

HER ASSOCIATE MEMBERS





STUART HOLMES STUDIED THE FACE.

HER ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

BY

PANSY

Author of "Chrissy's Endeavor," "The Hall in the Grove," "Mrs. Solomon Smith Looking On," "Little Fishers: and Their Nets," "Judge Burnham's Daughters," "Eighty-Seven," "Miss Dee Dunmore Bryant," "An Endless Chain," and others.



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HER ASSOCIATE MEMBERS.

CHAPTER I.

SHE IGNORES THEM.

AT this present time she signs her name "Christine Hollister Holmes," and her visiting cards read "Mrs. Stuart Holmes." I tell you this in order that people who were acquainted with Chrissy Hollister may have no doubt as to her identity. She was sitting before an open window, although in many latitudes it was the season of the year when windows are kept tightly closed, and coal or steam holds sway. There was a suspicion of fire in the open grate, but the air was odorous with burning pine, instead of anthracite, and the breath which came in at the open windows was fragrant with roses instead of being touched with frost.

The face which looked out into the street below was fair, and, on the whole, sweet, though the brow was somewhat clouded, and there was a look in the eyes which told the close observer something about a disappointment bravely borne, which nevertheless shadowed her face at times.

Stuart Holmes, lying on a couch outside of the line of the breeze, yet in a position to command a side view of the face, studied it for a moment, then closed his eyes and drew the faintest possible sigh. He had a gay afghan thrown over him, and drooped his head among the pillows in a way which suggested debility.

Mrs. Holmes had turned but a moment before from a small writing-table, whereon lay at this moment a bulky package sealed and addressed to "Mrs. Chess Gardner." Had you been looking over her shoulder while she wrote, you would have understood the situation better; perhaps the easiest way is to give you a chance to hear something of what she wrote to her old-time friend.

"We are settled at last for the winter," so the letter ran. "We spent only a month at the first stopping-place; the air proved to be too bracing for Stuart, and the boarding accommodations were not pleasant. I was almost glad when it did not suit Stuart, for a more uninviting place, I think, I was never in. There were people enough, young people, too, and I tried to get interested in them;

rather, I expected to be interested, as a matter of course. They had some sort of an organization; the 'Young People's Club,' I think they called it. Such a dreadful name for a society, I think. But I tried to harmonize with it. I had not been there two days before I sought out the president and secretary, and made an effort to lend a helping hand. They needed help badly enough, but were in that most deplorable of all states, satisfied with themselves. I found that all in the world they were doing with their organization was having what they were pleased to call 'a good time.' Of course, there were many who were not being reached. In fact, no one had an idea of trying to reach anybody for the sake of helping him in any way. I talked volumes, Stuart said, with the officers, trying to show them a better way. It was very depressing work; they had not the least desire to be shown. But this I did not understand at first; it seemed incredible to me that young people in health, and with average intelligence, would not rather do something than nothing, even though their standard was not very high. The place was small, with no advantages; at least, with no reading-room, and a circulating library which, owing to the miserable selections that had been made, they would have been infinitely better off without. No place for evening gatherings, except the railroad station

and the saloons. The young men who had no homes, as well as some who had, seemed to have a good excuse for lounging in the aforesaid objectionable places. I talked reading-room earnestly. They said they had no funds with which to buy books or papers. I suggested beginning on a very small scale; offered to secure a package of books for them, and proposed that each member of the organization should be asked to bring from home the family newspaper, after it had been read. Stuart said that was hazardous advice, because of the selection which some would have made, and that, perhaps, I should be thankful that my advice was not followed. But I can hardly imagine any worse reading in the daily or weekly average newspapers than the ten-cent paper-covered novels they had chosen. Well, no matter; they did nothing of the kind. The next objection was that it would be impossible to secure a place of meeting; there was no suitable room in the village, and, if there were, no money to secure it. But you know my propensity for not giving up a thing. I pushed hard; canvassed the town; found an unused store which, with scrubbing and a few dollars spent on cheap curtains and lamps, with a chair donated from each home, would have done very well. The rent was absurdly low, and I was jubilant over my discovery. Thirty dollars would have covered

the necessary expenses for getting that room ready for use, and paying the rent for six months! I went to that inane club at their next regular meeting and reported, only to be assured that it would be impossible to raise the thirty dollars. I did not believe it, for, though by no means wealthy, it was not a poverty-stricken town, and I felt sure that those young people spent on nothings, each six months of their lives, more than enough to cover the sum. However, they were beyond convincing. Still, I could not give up the idea. The more I saw of the young men lounging about on disreputable corners, the more important it seemed. Stuart and I talked it all over. He is a young man, you know, and an entire year away from business, with a long illness, followed by a winter's banishment from home, traveling and living as an invalid, are not calculated to increase one's resources; still, of course, we had our "sacred fund," and the only question was to use it in the wisest way; because it was smaller than usual, we wanted to be even more careful in its expenditure. At last we resolved to appropriate fifty dollars to the starting of an enterprise of the kind we proposed. We made the amount fifty because certain things seemed necessary if one was going to do it alone, which, working together with a committee, all bent on saving, and doing as much as possible with a

little, we should have voted to get along without. Stuart was not so well that week, and I could only talk with him at intervals, and would not let him shoulder a bit of risk, of course; so I went out myself, afternoons when he was taking his rest, rented the building, hired a woman to clean and a man to repair, and, to make my long story brief, spent five days of planning and working with hired helpers, putting it in perfect order. It was very plain, but exceedingly neat-looking when everything was done, and I had great joy in it. I do not believe our lovely rooms on the avenue gave me any greater thrills of delight than did this, which you would have been restrained only by politeness from calling a barn. I do not know what the dear club thought I was about, I am sure; they never came to see, and showed no interest in the matter. I flattered myself for a time that I was keeping my work a profound secret, until Stuart laughed at me and told me one would suppose I had never spent a season in a small village where everybody knew his neighbor's affairs.

“When everything was ready, I wrote a little note to the president, tendering the club the use of the room for the next six months, free of expense, only stipulating that they should have it lighted on certain evenings of each week, if they could not arrange for every evening, and

have a committee in attendance to entertain any that should come; just as we do at our rooms, you know. Nellie, I hope you are prepared for the result, but certainly I was not. Do you believe that they declined the offer, on the plea that they could not find a suitable entertainment committee, and that the work of caring for such a room, lighting and keeping it in order was too much for them! I was never so disappointed in my life. Oh, I was more than disappointed; the thing just overpowered me. For days I could not rise above the humility and bitterness of my defeat. You know I am not used to failing.

“Stuart tried his best to comfort me, and, because he was so miserable and must not be troubled, I pretended to be comforted often when my heart was in a perfect turmoil. I would not like to tell you how many times I cried about it all. Aside from the pain of failing utterly in an undertaking upon which I had spent so much time and money, there was a sense of being misunderstood, and of affording amusement to a certain class of people who had apparently delighted in misunderstanding me. I came to have a feeling almost like humiliation when I would meet one of the club. They looked at me with such queer, almost triumphant smiles, and giggled after I had passed them. I came to understand that they looked upon me as a sort of

crank, who was bent upon taking leadership, and had been successfully put down. Oh, I will not try to describe to you how I felt. The experience has been too recent. Stuart was as good as gold; he never once said, or even looked, 'I told you so,' although I could see afterward that he had offered several sympathetic hints to the effect that I must not expect too much of the club; but I did not understand; I thought I was expecting very little of them. I honestly thought that they held back because they did not know how much could be done with a little money, and had a horror of involving themselves in financial obligations which they could not meet. When Stuart saw how utterly humiliated I was, he wanted me to agree to his trying to open the room himself; sitting there for an hour or two in the evening to receive such young men as curiosity might induce to drop in. Would it not have been a grand thing if he could have done so? Think what a chance for those tobacco-smoking, swearing young men to have come in contact with a man like him for even a few times in their lives! But of course I could not consent to any such a plan as that after Dr. Douglass' warning that I must not let my husband even think what his name was for at least three months. Part of my anxiety was that I had talked so much with Stuart about it as to retard his recovery; but he was fully as

anxious as I was to have something done. Well, the conclusion of the whole matter was, that he had a sharp illness of several days' duration which, for the time being, put that ill-fated room, with its new whitewash and fresh lamps, entirely out of my mind. After that came the doctor's orders to 'move on.' So one morning, after I had packed our trunks, and Stuart was resting, with the doctor's son on guard to see that he was not disturbed, I went down to the room, packed away the pretty vases and mats and engravings with which I had tried to brighten the place, took down, shook and folded away the pretty imitation Madras curtains, and, leaving every thing in startling order, locked the door, carried the key to the owner, paid him the rent promised, took his receipt for the same, and his honestly expressed conviction that the young folks in that place were a 'dumb lot that did not know on which side their bread was buttered, and never would,' and went home a wiser and a sadder woman. Not without passing a couple of girls walking the street with a couple of persons whom they spoke of as 'fellows,' who all indulged in prolonged giggles, I suppose, over the recognized bundles in my hands. So much for my venture on the sea of benevolence alone in a foreign land.

"We left by the afternoon train; came to this place, which is called a city, but which seems a

mere hamlet when one thinks of home; and tried to settle down and wait. That is what I have at last resolved to do. Stuart is really better. My heart is jubilant over that, and it is certainly joy enough in itself to sustain me through the winter. I shall give my undivided attention to him, and help him gain faster than man ever did before. And while he sleeps, and drinks in health with every breath of this balmy air, I shall fold my hands. I do not mean to get interested in a human being; I do not mean to ask their names, or where they go to church, or to think whether they so much as have higher natures which are being stifled. I shall call it a lost winter, so far as outside life is concerned, and wait until I get back to our dear rooms, and our grand girls, and noble, self-sacrificing men, before I take any more flights in the land of 'Endeavor.' There are some places evidently where all one can do is to endeavor to possess his soul in patience, until the time comes for work again. I have been slow to learn the lesson, but I think it is effectually learned. At least, if you hear of me as interesting myself, during this entire winter, in any thing beyond broths and gruels, and fresh fruits and easy carriages, and pillows and tonics, and the quickest way of restoring wasted physical strength, set me down as a lunatic at once. If I am tempted to think of any other 'endeavor,'

the memory of those girls in that never-to-be-forgotten club will at once restrain me. Think of my fifty dollars wasted! How many things you blessed home workers might have accomplished with even that small sum; and there it is locked up in a vacant room into which the sunlight streams all day long, helping to create dust and cobwebs. Never mind, Nellie, my husband is stronger to-day than he was yesterday, and he was stronger yesterday than the day before, and May is only five months away. I shall write you long letters, all about my success as a nurse, and about how I live in the blessed past and hope-lined future, and ignore the present, outside of this boarding-house, which is worthy of being ignored, but we cannot quite compass it. We have been obliged to come to a sort of second-rate place, in order to insure the quiet so necessary for Stuart. Desirable houses are crowded, but we do passably well here; they allow me to go into the kitchen to prepare the beef broth and toast the bread, so Stuart's diet will be watched with jealous eyes, and consume much of my time and strength. I did not mean to write you this story, I meant not to tell a living soul of my ignominious failure, but that vacant room stared at me so continuously that I could not help it. I think I shall take up my neglected German again, to amuse myself during the inter-

vals of nursing and cooking. One must do something while one's charge sleeps. Long naps, morning and afternoon, are specialties in Stuart's case."

This letter, which had really not been written at one sitting, but had consumed the leisure of several afternoons, having been sealed and laid aside, Mrs. Holmes gave her eyes to the street outside and her thoughts to that past which every day seemed more dear to her in contrast with the present. Moreover—though she had not put it into words—her heart was sometimes busy with that weary question, "Why?" with which we often wear out our hearts. Why, for instance, should a man so thoroughly consecrated as her husband, whose schemes for bettering the world were numerous and successful, be suddenly stricken down in his prime, and brought to the very verge of the grave? So low, indeed, that after the immediate danger was past, the creeping back to health and strength was so slow that for days together no improvement could be discovered, and numerous drawbacks made havoc with the little gain which the weeks developed. Why should all this have come to him, making it necessary for both of them to leave the work to which they had consecrated their leisure hours, and all possible increase over and above their daily living, and go far away among strangers not

only, but uncongenial ones? Among people, apparently, who had nothing in common with their way of thinking or doing.

“It is just a lost winter,” was the sad mental conclusion to which Mrs. Chrissy was wont to come, when she went over again the story of her recent past: “Stuart needed the rest, I suppose, and the dear Lord knew him well enough to know that he could not get it in any other way, and I am necessary to the entire rest which his body and brain need. Well, for that last I can never cease to be thankful; I must just be content to take *my* rest, which certainly neither my body nor mind needed, in order that he may the more surely have his. I will count it my lost winter, and fold my hands over it as smoothly as I can and wait.”

But her face, as I said, was clouded. She was not rebellious, but sad; the days were really very long. Glad, she was, thankful from her inmost soul for her husband's manifest improvement; she sang a thanksgiving hymn in her heart many times each day over it; nevertheless, there were hours in the long day, while her husband slept, or while he lay in a state half-dreaming, half-waking, drinking in health with every breath, but much better entirely undisturbed even by the voice of his wife, when the time hung heavily upon the young wife's hands. It seemed strange, indeed,

to her who had lived so active a life, giving all her time, of late years, to the service of others, to be laid aside; yet that she was laid aside from active work as certainly as her husband, was her deliberate conclusion.

“I am fitted to work only in certain lines,” she told herself. “The Christian Endeavor Society which took such strong hold of me, I can work through; but remove me from that place, and I am useless. I only make blunders which are injurious to the cause. That giggling club will giggle on and be more silly all their lives, I suppose, because of my failure among them. I have really done them an injury, when I had a single desire to help; and I have spent a large part of my treasured ‘tenth’ for worse than nothing! To think that I imagined I could transform that club into a full-fledged Christian Endeavor society! They could not even ‘endeavor,’ to say nothing of the word ‘Christian’; and I could not move them in any direction save that of ridicule. Well, wisdom is dearly learned sometimes. I will profit by my experience. I will carefully avoid the young people in this vicinity; and, judging from the specimens I have seen, it will not be a trial for me to do so.”

CHAPTER II.

THEY COMPEL HER ATTENTION.

WHILE the letter-writer sat gazing into space with that half-sad, half-retrospective look upon her face which at times troubled her husband, he broke the silence. "Chrissy, dear, why do you not take a walk? This sweet air must be more enjoyable outside than in this room."

She turned toward him quickly with the smile that was always ready for his eyes. "I thought you were sleeping," she said, "and would not move to disturb you. I think I will take a walk, if you are entirely comfortable. I want to see our laundress, and I am going to try to find some juicier oranges for you."

Bonnet, gloves and small shoulder-cape, the only wrap that the balmy air required, were soon in order, and Chrissy bent before the couch for good-by.

"I am going first to the kitchen to see that

your beef-tea is conducting itself in a proper manner, and to see if Happy can be installed near the door to answer to your call."

"I do not require the outside help, I think," he said, smiling; "I am in need of nothing, and have a fund of happiness in my own heart to draw upon till you come back."

The smile his wife gave him in response had a wistful touch in it. Her husband, lying on his couch utterly laid aside, was so much more willing to wait than she found it in her restless heart to do. She thought it over as she made her way with careful steps through the long, wide, not overclean passage that led from the front part of the house to the kitchen. At the door, which was ajar, she paused to listen, not to the noise, but to the unwonted stillness. Mrs. Stetson's kitchen was by no means generally a quiet place; the clatter of pans and kettles mingled with the discord of sharp words at all hours of the day. A most uncomfortable woman was Mrs. Stetson, "out of her sphere if ever a woman was," Mrs. Holmes wrote in her home letters, and added: "The saddest part of it is, one can only wonder, in looking at her, what her sphere could possibly have been! I cannot think of a spot in the world where she would really fit."

Such being the situation, not to hear either dishes or voice was ominous of something strange.

Chrissy, waiting for she hardly knew what, softly pushed the door open and looked in. About the stove even more than the usual disorder prevailed. The debris of the long-past dinner was so great that the young woman reflected with satisfaction over the tightly closed jar in which her husband's beef tea was simmering. Beside the window, which commanded a view of the street, sat Mrs. Stetson, doing absolutely nothing, save that with one corner of her soiled kitchen apron she brushed away two or three great tears, which struggled down her sallow, much wrinkled face. Mrs. Stetson actually crying! The sight appalled her boarder. To have seen her frowning, scolding, tossing pans and brooms or sticks of wood right and left in a frenzy of haste and angry bewilderment would have been a common sight; but this was a new development. Chrissy stood irresolute. Should she retire? But the beef tea, perhaps, needed more water in the kettle; and then where was Happy, whose services she needed? She finally retired a few steps, and made much noise opening and closing a door, that needed no attention; having thus heralded her coming, she advanced briskly. The ruse took effect. Mrs. Stetson turned hastily from the window, and began to clatter the dishes; but there were traces of tears upon her cheeks, and Chrissy could not forget them. She lingered even after

her errand was done, albeit her landlady was in a most unpropitious mood.

"I am sure I do not know where Happy is," she said, sharply; "stuck away in some corner reading a worthless book, I suppose; that's where she generally is when she isn't doing worse. If there was ever a more worthless girl than Happy born into this world, I'm glad it was not my lot to see her. Yes, she can sit by the door as well as not; it's all she's good for, and I do suppose she would know enough to answer if your husband called; and it's about all she does know."

"But I'm afraid you need her here," said Chrissy; "you have so much to do."

"That's a good reason for not needing her. She isn't worth the salt she eats on her potatoes. When it comes to such work as this, I'd rather have her out of the kitchen than in it. No, Mis' Holmes, I'd rather have the money you pay for her setting by your door doing nothing, than to see her slouching around making believe help. Sally will be back directly and take hold here."

"It is hard work to take care of so many people, is it not?" said Chrissy, still lingering. Some way the memory of those sorrowful-looking tears held her; she could not be willing to go away without attempting a word of comfort or at least of sympathy.

“It ain’t that altogether,” said Mrs. Stetson, evasively, and in a voice that told that the tears were still suspiciously near the surface. “There’s worse troubles than that in the world, Mis’ Holmes, and I have mine to bear. I’m sick of living.”

“Oh, no,” said Chrissy, briskly; “it’s a nice, pleasant world; only see how blue the sky is, and the air smells of roses and yellow jessamine, and I don’t know what other sweet things. Why, in my home a terrible north east storm has been raging for days together! My brother says he has almost forgotten how sunshine looks.”

“Humph!” said Mrs. Stetson, with an unmistakable sniff; “sunshine and roses is all very nice in their way, but it takes more than them to make a world, Mis’ Holmes.”

Chrissy laughed merrily. She was bent on cheering this woman.

“That is true,” she said; “it takes soups and bread and potatoes, and ever so many other things, and a great deal of hard work, does it not? That sweet-potato pie was very nice to-day, Mrs. Stetson.”

“I’m sure I’m glad of it,” said Mrs. Stetson, looking not one whit less gloomy. “Liph thought so too, I guess; he eat a whole one; Liph can show his appreciation that way as well as the next one. When you get to be an old woman

like me, Mis' Holmes, and have, maybe, a great six-foot boy to think about, you'll know what trouble is, and find out that it takes more than roses and sunshine to make bright weather."

"Children are a great responsibility, I know," Chrissy said, gently; "but, after all, what would the world be without your one? If Liph were gone, you would find it hard to realize that the sun shone."

This sentence was a desperate attempt to find the mother-heart of this ill-disciplined woman, and the speaker was utterly unprepared for the answer she received. Mrs. Stetson laid down the pan she was washing, with such energy that she hit it against another of its own metal, and the sound rang through the room, while she said with an intensity that would be hard to describe:

"I'd be glad and thankful to the ends of my toes, Mis' Holmes, if he lay in the grave this minute!"

"Oh, dear woman!" cried Chrissy, appalled; "do not say such terrible words! Think how fearfully you may some day regret them."

Mrs. Stetson dashed the dishwater from her hands with a fierce shake, and spoke with almost more energy than before.

"I would, Mis' Holmes; that is as true, as there is a sun in the sky. You stand there, pretty and smiling, and think life is all made of

roses and things; you don't know nothing about it; wait till you have a boy of your own, and slave your fingers to the bone to dress him up in a white dress every day, and pretty little shoes with buckles on them, and a blue sash, and all that, and curl his hair over your fingers, and make a fool of yourself, being proud of him because he is handsomer than your neighbor's boy. Then let him grow up and learn to stand around street corners and loaf, and say low words such as you never heard in your life till he brought 'em home to you, and learn to smoke and chew, and learn to sneer at you for an old woman that doesn't know any thing, and learn by and by to spend his days and half his nights in those low-down pestiferous saloons, and drink their low-down whiskey till he doesn't know enough not to strike you when he comes staggering home, and you trying to help him to bed. Then you'll talk, maybe, about roses and sunshine, but I don't believe it! Yes, ma'am; if I could go back over the years and dress him up in his white dress and his pretty shoes, and curl his hair and lay him in a handsome coffin, don't you think I'd do it and be glad over it? I tell you, you don't know any thing about it." And Mrs. Stetson turned away with the bitterest sob Chrissy had ever heard, with the corner of her soiled apron at her eyes again.

The intruder looked at her in utter dismay.

What was she to say to so great a sorrow? Yet how could she, a Christian woman, turn away from trouble like this without an attempt to comfort? She went forward until she stood close to the mother, whose hair was prematurely gray, and said in low, pitiful tones:

"I am very sorry for you; I wish I could do something to help you."

"There ain't nothing in life that can help me," Mrs. Stetson said, struggling to regain her composure. "I've give up. I've talked to Liph and scolded him, tried to shame him into being somebody; and I never accomplished nothing, only to make him mad. There's nothing to look forward to now but ruin for him and me, and sometimes I think if I could do something to hurry it along, that would be the best for both of us."

"God can save Liph." The voice that spoke this brief, important sentence, was low and sweet, but wonderfully earnest. There was no answering thrill in the woman's heart; there was no lifting of the gloom on her face. Even the sacred name had no strong, tender association for her.

"It is too late for any thing but ruin," she repeated. "I've known that this good while, but I don't often break down. I'm ashamed to have you see me like this, Mis' Holmes. I ain't got no call to bother you with my miseries. You go

on and don't mind me. I'll be myself in a few minutes, and I'll send that worthless Happy right straight up stairs, and see that she sits there, too. I'll look out for him myself, Mis' Holmes; so you needn't to worry."

Mrs. Holmes went away with slow step, like one in a dream. What a page of life she had unwillingly looked upon this bright afternoon! Who would have supposed that Mrs. Stetson ever cried—ever did anything, indeed, but struggle with her three meals a day, and her inefficient help, and scold her one boy? During the two or three weeks of their stay in the house, Mrs. Holmes had scarcely given this boy a thought, save sometimes to sigh and occasionally to smile, when Mrs. Stetson's shrill voice was heard calling him "a worthless, good-for-nothing, lazy, low-lived fellow, not worth the salt which he used on his potatoes."

She had supposed him to be a half-grown, mischievous youngster, who did not like to work, and whose mother meant very little of what she said to him. Neither she nor Stuart had ever seen the boy, but Stuart had been amused at some of the phrases that floated up to him occasionally from the rooms below, and had adopted them to the extent that he would sometimes say to his wife: "I'm not worth the salt in this beef tea, Chrissy, dear." And they had both laughed

over it, and had not dreamed that the words were the utterance of a bitter, almost broken-hearted woman. As Mrs. Holmes crossed the street and moved toward the supply store that occupied the furthest corner of the square, she heard a loud voice call, "Look out there, Liph! that beam will hit you."

She turned quickly in the direction of the beam, curious to see not it but Liph. He was shambling across the street, dangerously near to the beam of some heavy machinery, which was being let down from a store-room above. Could it be possible that that was Liph, the merry-hearted, lazy, roguish boy, with tangled curls and bare feet and torn jacket, whom she had always pictured when she had heard his mother's voice?

A great awkward fellow, towering six feet high, with a shock of unkempt hair; swarthy of skin, repulsive as regarded dress and manner, with a scowl on his face, and with fierce eyes, which looked at one askance from under heavy eyebrows. There was a certain something in his very walk that indicated utter recklessness. Mrs. Holmes moved on rapidly, but she couldn't get away from the sinking of heart that had come to her as she caught a full view of Liph's face. She could not get away from his mother's words, "There's nothing for Liph but ruin."

It looked only too probable. This young

worker in the Master's vineyard knew nothing at all about the class that Liph Stetson represented. Young men in danger, needing wise and patient hands reached out to save them, she knew, or thought she knew, a good deal about. Had she not begun with her own brother years and years ago? But almost unconsciously to herself, such young men had, in her thoughts, taken the condition of her brother Harmon during those dangerous years of his life—handsome, gay, witty, well dressed, fond of society, but scorning any thing like coarseness or roughness. Then, too, she knew about clerks in groceries and drug stores, and the great army of respectably-employed young men that these classes represented. Chrissy Hollister's world had lain among them, and in her new home in the city, she and her husband, backed by their grand Christian Endeavor society, had worked faithfully, with blessed results, among many such. Absorbed in her work, Chrissy, at least, had forgotten that there was another, and perhaps even a larger, class, sorely needing help, with which she never came in contact. Liph Stetson brought this fact to her notice in a startling manner. The giggling club, which had made such a lasting impression upon her, was of another class from those to which she had been used; but they were altogether unlike Liph.

She walked on, thinking about him and about his mother. What could be done for either of them? If only Stuart were well! But he must not even be told the story. It would excite him too much, he would be so eager to do something. On the whole, Mrs. Holmes, as she walked briskly down the long street toward her washer-woman's, broke utterly her resolution to have nothing to do with "the young people in this vicinity," and gave more thought to one young person in that single half-hour than she had given to the entire city before. Still, she did not realize that such was the case. So utterly different was Liph Stetson from her known world, that she hardly recognized him as belonging to the "young people." She reached the door of Mrs. Carpenter's shabby little house without having had a single ray of hope given her concerning Liph's future; without a suggestion as to how to reach him in any way.

Mrs. Carpenter was ironing. Upon the two other occasions when Mrs. Holmes had seen her she had been ironing, and as the caller stood for a moment watching the swift passes of the iron over the snowy muslin, she wondered curiously if this comprised the woman's life. Her encounter with Liph and his mother had somehow roused her interest in humanity. She had forgotten to dream about home and wonder what the girls

were doing, and what they would do this winter, and what would be said and done that first night when she and Stuart went back to them. She had thought only of Mrs. Stetson and Liph. Now she added Mrs. Carpenter to her list.

“The woman is young,” she thought; “she can hardly be more than thirty. What hard lines there are on her face! She must have been pretty once. What a strange impression she gives one that it was a long time ago—forty years ago at least! Yet there isn’t a thread of gray in her hair, and her eyes have fire in them. How severely plain her dress is! Just a ‘straight-up-and-downness,’ Stuart would say, without even a collar to relieve it, and her hair stretched back as straight and as firmly as comb and hairpins will accomplish. But it is smooth, and her dress is clean. Poor Mrs. Stetson could not possibly put herself into such neatness. This woman is of a different type from Mrs. Stetson. Her face does not look happy. I wonder if she, too, has a story.”

CHAPTER III.

THEY INCREASE IN NUMBER.

THE thought closed with a little sigh. Mrs. Holmes was certainly dipping into strange chapters of life this afternoon, all unexpectedly.

Not willing to allow herself to become interested in another person, she cut short her reverie by knocking at the door. The ironer raised her eyes for an instant, then dropped them, and deliberately finished the pillow-case she was ironing, folded and hung it on the bars near at hand, and set her iron on the stove, before she came slowly forward, with the slightest possible bend of her head, and waited for the intruder to announce her errand.

"Mrs. Carpenter," said her caller, "I came to speak about the wrappers. I do not want them starched, please. I forgot to mention it. I hope I am not too late."

"No," Mrs. Carpenter said, "I have not got

to the wrappers yet, but they would look much better for being starched."

"I know," said Mrs. Holmes, "but I want to fold them away. They are not suited to my needs here. I find I have half filled my trunk with articles which do not belong to this latitude."

"I suppose that is because you do not belong to this latitude yourself," Mrs. Carpenter said, with a sort of cold dignity.

It was a strange thing to say. Mrs. Holmes regarded her somewhat curiously, interested in spite of herself.

"May I come in and rest a few minutes?" she asked, suddenly. "It is a longer walk than I imagined; I have driven here before, you know."

"Of course," said Mrs. Carpenter, meaning, "Of course, you can rest."

The words were spoken in the same indifferent tone as before. There was not the slightest pretense of cordiality. Mrs. Holmes entered, and took the seat toward which her hostess motioned. It was a wooden-seated chair from which the paint had all been scrubbed away. There were only three chairs in the room, all of hard, uncompromising wood. Two of them were now doing duty as clothes-bars. The room was very clean and very bare — not an attempt at comfort of any sort. The unceiled walls were hung with several

articles of wearing apparel, a man's coat with the rest. A small table in the corner had a man's hat resting on it beside a common kerosene lamp, which was perfectly clean. The stove on which the irons busied themselves getting ready for work, had not been blackened for months, apparently, but had been washed clean that very day, and no litter of ashes or of chips was visible. In short, every thing was in dreary order, and the number of articles which comprised the entire furnishing were startlingly few.

Mrs. Holmes looked about her with pitiful curiosity. The thought that this was actually a home struck her with a sense of chill. Not a picture any where, not a book or paper, not a flower or plant, not a living thing save that white-faced, stern-eyed ironer at the table! Even the flies seemed to have deserted the place, discouraged, perhaps, by the scrupulous cleanliness and the absence of a crumb on which to feast. Did the woman by the table feel at home? Was she glad to make every thing so clean the guest wondered. Had she come away to a land of strangers with one for whom to iron and scrub and save were opportunities for which she thanked God? "I could do it for Stuart," thought the happy wife, "if that were the thing to do; but this woman does not look like it. Perhaps she is a widow, poor thing! I have never asked a question about

her. She looks like an unhappy woman. She cannot have a 'Liph' to mourn over, she is so young. Perhaps, though, she has a grave. Well, if it is a baby's grave, she may have much to be thankful for." And again Mrs. Stetson's words, which had seemed so terrible, occurred to her. The ironer ironed steadily, and stillness reigned. It began to grow embarrassing. Something ought to be said; the guest could not decide what.

"Is it hard work?" she asked, at last, watching the swift-moving iron.

"Did you never do it?"

The question startled her. It was not the sort of reply she had expected to receive.

"I do not remember that I ever did," she said, after a moment's hesitation. "I had duties in my mother's home, but that did not happen to be one of them; and since I have had a home of my own my hands have been full with other kinds of service. It does not look like hard work, but I suppose like every thing else which is worth doing, it requires practice in order to be skillful. You are a beautiful ironer, I think."

"I've had practice enough," was the cold reply, "and am likely to. One has to live, whether one wants to or not; and it's my way of living."

This seemed very pitiful. Mrs. Holmes was unwilling to leave the conversation, now that she

had once begun, without having some heart put into it.

“Do you not like to live?” she asked, gently.

It was not the sentence she had meant to say. It seemed almost to say itself, as well as the gentle words which followed. “Living is beautiful, I think, especially to-day. The sky is so blue, and the air so full of sweets. I heard a bird, as I came by the park, swelling into a perfect ecstasy of song. I never heard a bird sing in December before. I mean one that was not caged.”

The reply that she received startled her as much as Mrs. Stetson's tears.

“I hate life; I hate the sunshine and the smells and the birds. I hate every thing!”

Her guest looked at her with a keen sense of pain. Another phase of unhappy life with which she did not know how to deal. This was worse than Mrs. Stetson's. The very disorder and discomfort with which that woman was surrounded seemed to take some of the fierceness from what she said, while her tears humanized the appeal. But there were no tears here, the iron was moving more swiftly than before, and only a little sterner setting of the lips reminded one that the woman had spoken at all.

“It is God's world,” her caller said at last; “and the sunshine and birds and sweet perfumes,

were made to help you. Could you not get something from them for your life?"

"Yes, I get mockery from them; something which makes me hate life more every day; yet for decency's sake I go on living. People who have come from New England will do any thing for decency's sake."

"Are you from New England?" Mrs. Holmes asked with instant sympathy; "then you are, like myself, far away from home. Did you come for the sake of some one very dear to you?"

At the risk of probing a terrible wound, she resolved to ask that question. It would be much better for this fierce woman to break down utterly and weep before her than to keep such a pent-up torrent of pain in her heart.

"It must be a grave over which she is rebellious," thought her visitor, and she almost expected the iron to cease its swift passes, and to see the ironer's face buried in the garment she was smoothing.

"I came because I was a fool," was the hard reply, and the iron rushed over the board with redoubled vigor; "and I'm a fool to stand here talking about it," was the next outburst upon the dismayed silence. "What's the use of talking? What's the use of asking questions?"

"It sometimes helps, to talk," Mrs. Holmes said, at last, very gently; "when I am homesick,

I think if I only had some one to tell it to, half the trouble would be gone, but I have to keep very still. I am a stranger here, alone with my husband, and I dare not speak to him, because he is ill and needs all the help and cheer I can give him. I can imagine what it might be to live far away from one's home for years; quite alone in the world. Have you no friends here?"

"I have no friends anywhere, and never expect to have; but I don't know why I am telling you so."

"Because you are mistaken," Mrs. Holmes said, with quiet assurance. "Every one is mistaken who thinks so. You have many friends, brothers and sisters; the earth is every day being peopled with those who are kindred in Jesus Christ. I hope you know Him. If you do, you surely know that however sad your life may be, it is not desolate."

"I don't know any thing about it," said Mrs. Carpenter, doggedly. "I never did understand that kind of talk. When I was a girl in New England it used to be all Greek to me, and it is worse than that now. If you are one of that kind, you'd better not waste it on me. Oh, I'm not a heathen. I believe in God, and in the Bible, some of it at least; but it is precious little good it has ever done me, and the time has gone by when I expect it to. I'll have your clothes

ready by Friday, as I said, and I think they can be made to suit you."

Evidently that was a dismissal; but Mrs. Holmes was desperate. For the second time that day she had come in contact with one to whom the Name above all names was an idle word, bringing no suggestion of help or comfort, though there was sore need of both. Could she go away without another effort to help this soul in peril? Yet what would help her? If she only knew what had brought about this condition of rebellion!

"I am very sorry for you," she said, with exceeding gentleness; "I wish so much that I could do or say something to help you. Is your life so hard because you are alone in the world? Are you a widow?"

"No."

Nothing which had been said so dismayed the questioner as that single monosyllable, shot at her from a pair of lips which instinctively compressed themselves into the hardest lines Mrs. Holmes had ever seen on a woman's face! Certainly she had not said that if she were, her life would be more endurable; yet what did that face imply?

The sound of a step was heard outside, and there shambled toward the open door the figure of a man. A man with grizzly gray hair and

unkempt beard, bleared eyes and soiled linen; a man in his shirt sleeves, with his old hat pushed to the back of his head, the very abandonment of carelessness; a man whose clothes, and even beard, were stained with tobacco juice. In his hand he held an old smoke-blackened pipe, which had evidently just been removed from his mouth.

“Good-day, ma’am,” he said, nodding his head. To her dismay Mrs. Holmes discovered that the salutation was addressed to her. She arose suddenly, uncertain whether or not to return the courtesy. Was that a drunken man who had strayed into the wrong door? She turned toward Mrs. Carpenter to see if the appearance frightened her, and caught upon her face a look of utter repulsion, but there was no fear in it.

“Don’t come in here with that pipe,” she said, in tones which rasped as a file might upon steel; “you know better than that.”

“For the land’s sake!” said the man, “what hurt can the pipe do when it’s out?”

But he shambled away, and the guest made swift exit, amazed and sick at heart. Something in the woman’s manner told her that that man was her husband.

For several blocks Mrs. Holmes walked swiftly, conscious of an effort not to think at all. Her heart was so full of pain, and indeed almost of terror, that it seemed to her she must not think until

she was in a quieter mood. What misery was this upon which she had stumbled unawares? Two women in one afternoon, under the curse of sin, with apparently no knowledge of a remedy. But Mrs. Carpenter's case seemed far worse to the young wife than Mrs. Stetson's. She knew nothing about motherhood; but what mockery of marriage vows was here! That man to be that woman's husband! And the idea of a woman speaking to her husband as she had spoken to him! It was all too terrible to be thought about. What an awful world it was, viewed from some stand-points! She had heard of such people. The papers mentioned them sometimes. She had even in the city brushed past certain objects who had made her shiver and draw her dress away from contact; but to come face to face with a respectable woman, clean and neat, and with an air of rigid cleanliness about every thing that she touched, and to discover that she was bound by the holiest ties to such as that, was a contact which this woman had never made before. She found herself trembling in every limb. It would never do to present herself before Stuart in that state; he would think she had been alarmed, insulted perhaps, and would arouse to instant anxiety. She tried to think about the birds who were still singing, and to take in great whiffs of the perfume-laden air, and forget the pictures of

misery which had made such discord with the day. But it was hard to get away from them. She was glad when her own door was reached, albeit she was reminded that she had by no means gotten away from disagreeable subjects by seeing "Liph" stalking sulkily across the street toward home. He looked more repulsive to her than he had two hours before. She even told herself that he had a worse face than Mr. Carpenter, if it were possible that that man was Mr. Carpenter.

In the hall above, sat Happy, a paper-covered book in hand, and so absorbed that she did not hear the lady's step. Mrs. Holmes wondered if she would have been aroused by her husband's feeble voice, supposing he had wanted her.

"You must be fond of reading," she said, close at the girl's elbow.

Happy started violently.

"You scairt me half to pieces," she said; "I didn't hear you come, nor nothing."

"So I observed. What have you here that is so absorbing?" and she bent low enough to read the name on the title-page, "A Loyal Lover."

The name told her very little; she was not familiar with that class of literature, yet, with the discernment of the cultured woman, she instinctively gauged the probable merits of the book. What a pity that a girl having intellect enough to

read at all, should feed herself upon such material as this.

“It is an awful interesting story,” Happy said; “I was just reading how she couldn’t get out of the stone house; I don’t believe she ever will, either.”

“Is that interesting?” Mrs. Holmes asked.

“Why, yes,” said Happy; “what could be more interesting than a girl in a place out of which she could not get? He is trying his level best to get her, but I don’t believe he can do it.”

Who “he” or “she” was Mrs. Holmes did not try to discover. Her thoughts were still revolving about the problem which had beset her this afternoon. Just now it was taking a new form.

“Happy,” she said, dreamily, “does your name fit you?”

“Ma’am?” said Happy, staring harder than ever.

Mrs. Holmes smiled.

“A girl named Happy should be happy, should she not? Does yours tell the truth about you?”

“Oh!” said Happy. “No, ma’am, I ain’t happy a bit.”

Not even she, though her face looked so free from thought of any kind! Mrs. Holmes looked at her narrowly, wondering how deep was her dissatisfaction.

“What would it take to make you quite happy?” she said; “think and tell me.”

“Oh, I don’t need to think; I know,” and the girl’s face gleamed with a radiant smile. “If I had a pink silk dress trimmed with lace, and a fan trimmed with swan’s-down, I should be perfectly happy.”

Poor little idiot! Her questioner could have cried, but instead she laughed.

“Where did you see a fan trimmed with swan’s-down?” she asked, with her hand on the door-knob.

“She had one,” said Happy, inclining her head toward the book still on her lap.

“Well,” said Mrs. Holmes, “I am sorry it is not in my power to make you perfectly happy after your service to me. Has Mr. Holmes needed any thing?”

“I guess not, ma’am; he’s not spoken a word. He walked about the room some, and went out on the piazza once, and I asked if he wanted me, and he said no.”

“Thank you,” said the lady, and went in to her husband, thinking, as she did so, of Mrs. Carpenter and her husband.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE ORGANIZES.

HAPPY is not at rest, either," Mrs. Holmes said to her husband an hour later, as she sat beside him skillfully manipulating an orange and placing delicious morsels in his mouth. "Although her name is Happy, it does not fit. She needs a pink silk dress trimmed with lace, and a swan's-down fan to give her peace of mind."

They broke into merry laughter over poor Happy's idea of bliss; then, after a moment, Mr. Holmes asked:

"Why do you use that term 'either'? Are you turning pessimist, dear little wife?"

"Oh," she said, evasively, "I have seen several persons to-day who seemed to me far from happiness; and, indeed, Stuart, do you not think it is unusual to find people who are reasonably contented? The world seems full of disappointment and unrest."

“It is too true,” he said, gravely; “but the solution is plain; the world is at work trying to find its happiness in that which was never intended to satisfy souls, and disappointment is inevitable. Even among Christians I have often been pained with the thought which troubles you; so few of those who profess to have found the true source of satisfaction carry a satisfied front.”

There was a slight flush on his wife's face as she listened to his words. After a moment of silence, she said humbly:

“I know it. We do not succeed in impressing outsiders with the fact that we have found rest. But, Stuart, how can commonplace people who live in little worlds of their own, help that? When their plans go awry they must necessarily feel tried, must they not? And few people have self-control enough to cover their disappointment from the eyes of others.”

“It is more than self-control which is lacking, I think, dear wife; it is greatly to be feared that the people who feel a disappointment which amounts to bitterness, or results in continued brooding over the miscarriage of their plans, have not yet learned to trust themselves completely in God's hands, but are planning for their way instead of his; because, else, they would grasp the fact that ‘all things work together for good to those who love God.’”

The flush on Mrs. Holmes' face deepened ; she did not believe that her husband was talking at her, yet his words fitted.

“Do you know how different you are from other people?” she asked, after a moment ; “I have always thought so, but since your illness I am sure of it. For instance, you are very different from me ; I can join you in trusting, when all goes well, and we are hard at work together in the line which we have planned, but I haven't the grace which enables me to sit patiently with folded hands and wait. It has been wonderful to me to see how patiently you endure it all, and how quietly you wait for to-morrow. I wish I knew how to be like you, but I do not.”

The smile which he gave her was pleasant to see, as he said :

“The reason for that is obvious, too, my darling. ‘Grace sufficient for our day’ is the promise, and I daily thank our Heavenly Father that he has not made it necessary for you to rest ; that your health is strong, and your heart, relieved from anxiety, can take hold of his work as vigorously as ever ; therefore, of course, you are not prepared for resting or waiting.”

She shook her head.

“Ah, but, Stuart, that is not quite true ; there is health enough ; I never felt better ; but there is no work which I can do. I am forced to wait,

not needing to, you see. I think, after all, that is what gives me the feeling of unrest which I have sometimes. Not that I am unhappy," she added, earnestly, "or that my heart is not almost bursting with gratitude for His goodness in giving you back to me, but at times the thought of what we were doing at home and of how they miss us, makes me restless for the months to pass. I do not know how to work except in certain grooves."

It was his turn to shake his head.

"No, my dear, there is where you mistake. It is the Lord's world down here as well as at home, and the harvest waits for laborers here as elsewhere; the very fact that you have seen to-day and recognized starving souls trying to feed upon husks, proves that the Master is speaking to you through them. They are his lost ones, Chrissy. Has he sent you down here this winter to find some of them?"

The twilight was gathering fast. Mrs. Holmes was glad that her husband could not now distinctly see her face; she knew that a look almost of despair had swept over it. How utterly impossible it seemed to her to do any thing for people like Mrs. Stetson and Liph, and Mrs. Carpenter and her husband, and poor Happy, with her paper novels and her "pink silk" yearnings. Stuart did not know the sort of people she had seen that day, and she would not run the risk of giving

him a restless night by trying to describe them. However, as if he could read her thoughts, he went on :

“The longer I live, the more sure I am that the religion of Jesus Christ is the one thing suited to the needs of souls, no matter how high they are, humanly speaking, or how low. It is the one thing which effects results, without regard to station ; that, in itself, ought to mark its divine origin. Think of any other influence capable of reaching at once the palaces and the slums of this world, working transformations equally wonderful in both !”

Was there a power which could transform Mr. Carpenter and Liph Stetson? Yes, Chrissy Holmes believed, but she could not realize it. Rather, she could not realize the possibility of her being used as a factor in the case.

“I know only one way of working,” she said, humbly ; and she felt very humble, indeed. It was her humiliation, she thought, that she could work in one groove only.

“I was born in the Christian Endeavor Society, you know, and through that channel I have been able to help ; but outside of it I am paralyzed.”

“Yes,” he said heartily, “that is true ; it is true of all workers the world over, Chrissy ; honest endeavor, Christ permeating every thought and movement, is the one hope for the world. There

was never a grander name chosen for a society than that of Christian endeavor—it is at once simplicity itself, and all-comprehensive.”

His words gave Mrs. Holmes' heart a thrill. The thought came to her with new power that their society was, after all, simply a band of Christians organized for the purpose of doing to better advantage the work given them. What they did, was what individual Christians should be doing the world over; and there was a sense in which there was a Christian endeavor branch wherever one of God's people tarried. “I am and must be a Christian endeavorer,” she told herself, “wherever I am; there is no such thing as resting from it until God lays his hand upon me and bids me rest. But oh, what can I do? Haven't I tried?”

The idea of forming the people whose acquaintance she had made that afternoon into a society floated through her mind with such an utterly ludicrous side to it, that she could scarcely keep herself from bursting into laughter. What if she should attempt so wild a thing? Make Liph Stetson, for instance, secretary, and Mrs. Stetson and Mrs. Carpenter a “lookout committee!” But the thought was not, after all, born of frivolity. The ludicrous element in it faded before a sudden, solemn thought, chiming in with the thoughts which had just preceded it. Why not?

She was a Christian endeavorer—an active member. Why not consider these, and any others against whom she brushed, as associate members, and work toward securing them for active service? Not in a public organization, of course. To have attempted even an explanation of her hopes and plans to any one of them would have been folly; but all the same she realized, with a brilliant smile, that there was an organization—Jesus Christ, the great Head of the United Society, and she, the “active member,” working together. The idea thrilled her, as well it might. She moved about, setting the room to rights, stepping lightly, for Stuart was weary after his long talk, and lay back among the pillows, resting. But as she set back the chairs and folded and laid away papers, there was in her heart a spring of hope and cheer, such as had not been felt for days. A definite purpose was formed. It took no shape as yet, so far as regarded action, but the resolve had quickened her pulses into a healthy glow. She could not help giving Stuart a hint of it as she brought him his glass of milk, just before he slept that night.

“Stuart, I am not going to force myself to rest; I shall wait for that, until it is sent for me to do. I shall try again, in some way, I don’t how, and in truth the how has been the trouble all the while. Don’t you know how I failed, so very lately?”

“Yes,” he said, smiling; “were you ever told, dear wife, that the measure of your responsibility was to be determined by the success you had in his work? Did you ever think how often Jesus Christ seemed to fail, when he was on earth?”

She had moved from him to give attention to the lamp, but she turned back and gave him the full view of a radiant face.

“Oh, Stuart! I never thought of that! How wonderful it was! They sneered at Him, and yet He went steadily on!”

At the moment she thought, with a blush of shame, of the giggling club. What power they had over her, even in the face of the experience of Jesus Christ!

“Thank you,” she said, bending down to him for good-night, “I wonder that you have not been almost ashamed of me.”

Plans for aggressive work by no means shaped themselves during the night, as the newly-resolved worker had almost hoped they would. The way looked as bewildering as ever by the next morning’s light, but her resolution was unshaken. She had established her husband on the front piazza, with his feet in a flood of sunshine, and his eyes screened from its glare. He had taken his morning walk down the long stretch of veranda, had plucked with his own hand a spray of sweet-scented bloom which had climbed

up to him on the trellis; had eaten a freshly-laid egg and a piece of toast prepared by his wife's own hands, had finished with an orange or two, and now was resting and looking the very embodiment of patient gratitude. Indeed, they had both been jubilant over the fact that he had walked a hundred steps further this morning than he had since his sickness, and with less fatigue. There was a song in his wife's heart as she moved about their room, putting the dainty touches here and there which made of it a home, instead of an inclosure with four walls and the bare necessities. "Happy" was blundering with the hearth belongings—letting the shovel fall with a loud clang, letting the ashes escape from her and filter over the matting; doing every thing with as little appearance of skill as was possible, and with an air of farawayness which suggested that her thoughts were still upon the hapless "lovers," whoever they might be. As Mrs. Holmes' eyes came back from the picture which she made in her torn and soiled dress of flimsy cotton, much too light and too showily made for the work with which it was associated, her eye was caught by the motto which hung at the foot of the bed. A lovely bit of illuminated lettering, in German text, done by her brother Harmon's hand: "As Ye Have Opportunity." Those were the words which appealed to her with sudden power. She

had asked for plans, for ways of working, for definite openings. Was this her answer? "As ye have opportunity." Why, of course. What could any worker do but follow that simple rule?

Was the girl sitting stupidly among the ashes, the sweeping-brush held absently in a hand disfigured by two or three very cheap rings, while with the other hand she toyed with a tawdry ribbon, the soiled ends of which hung down from her neck — was this person an opportunity? What could possibly be done for her now and here?

As Mrs. Holmes looked, her heart grew pitiful. Was it not, after all, almost as sad a picture of a wasted life as even Mrs. Carpenter presented? How easily one could forecast the future for her, and imagine her a careworn, slatternly, fretful woman, mismanaging a dreadful home, misruling some miserable children, unless, indeed, a worse picture might be drawn for her! Something of this kind, unless some wonderful uplifting power took hold of her.

What was it Stuart had said? "There is only one influence which is strong enough to reach palace and hovel alike, and transform both." Forever blessed be the name of Him who had revealed such a power in the world. But how could it be made to touch the girl in the ashes?

"Happy," said her mistress, suddenly, "have you reconciled yourself yet to your name?"

“Ma’am?” said Happy, stupidly, letting fall the brush and scattering a fresh cloud of ashes as she spoke.

“I am still thinking about your name; it ought to fit. Why do you not set about making your life so happy that people who hear you called will be sure to feel how wise it was to have named you so?”

Happy giggled bashfully.

“I ain’t no kind of objection to bein’ happy,” she said, “but I don’t know how I could go to work; not just now. I have as good a time as I can git, but that is saying dreadful little.”

“Oh, but I feel sure you are mistaken in that. People take the strangest ways of having good times! They are always after happiness—everybody is—but they make mistakes in their plans. Do you know what your name means? What is the full name?”

“It is an awful homely one,” Happy said disdainfully. “I was named for my grandmother; and I’m sure I don’t know why she wanted to have anybody going around carrying it forever; it’s Hepzibah. I never heard such a name. I wouldn’t give it to a cat.”

“I am not sure that I would,” Mrs. Holmes said, smiling, “but that does not alter the fact that it is a beautiful name for a woman.”

Whereupon Happy sat upright and stared.

“Now you don't think it is pretty!” she said, incredulously.

“It is better than pretty; it is beautiful, because of its meaning. Do you know what it means?”

“Means!” repeated Happy, in bewilderment. “Why, it means just the name of somebody.”

“Yes, but in olden times, more often than now, names had meanings. That is an old Hebrew word, the language, you know, in which part of the Bible was written, and it means, ‘My delight is in her.’ Can you think of having a very great and powerful friend, who, whenever he thought of you, or heard your name, would feel its fitness, because he would say to himself, ‘My delight is in her’?”

Such a look of soft, womanly radiance spread over Happy's silly face, that Mrs. Holmes was almost dismayed; it was only too apparent that she was giving form and name to the “great and powerful friend,” and that her conception was as far as possible from that of the woman who was trying to talk to her. Did she name the friend from the novel which had absorbed her, and did he exist as yet only between wretched paper covers, or had he taken visible shape to this silly, ignorant girl? Mrs. Holmes made haste with her next thought; albeit she knew not how to present it, and wondered whether this were, possibly, a case of “casting pearls.”

“I am thinking, Happy, of the verse in the Bible where your name is mentioned. Did you know your name was in the Bible? ‘Thou shalt be called Hepzibah,’ a prophet once said, ‘for the Lord delighteth in thee.’ If you lived such a life that the dear Lord himself, looking down and watching you all day, as he does, could delight in you, do you not know that your name would fit, and that, in spite of any thing which could happen to you, you would certainly be happy?”

The girl seemed startled, half frightened; and the radiant look faded from her face. She replied dully, after a moment: “I don’t know much about the Bible; I ain’t had no chance to learn. My mother died when I was a little thing, and I begun to live out before I could talk plain. So them kind of things ain’t for me.”

CHAPTER V.

THEY APPALL HER.

THEN she leaned forward, with a half sigh, and began to brush the hearth vigorously. Chrissy looked at her, with an unutterable pity swelling in her heart. What had the girl included in "them things" which were not for her, sweeping them away as carelessly as she was doing with the ashes? All the glorious possibilities of life — character, and influence, and love, and Jesus, and heaven! Oh, the pity of it! Yet she had not been touched. The speaker's words, though intended in utmost simplicity, had been away beyond her range. The thought of it being possible for the Lord to delight in her had not reached the outermost circle of her thoughts; nay, she was lower down than that. Her conception of God was not such that the thought of the bare possibility of any human being reaching so high thrilled her. Mrs. Holmes tried again.

"Happy," she said, with an earnestness which

arrested the brush once more, "I wish you would enter into an agreement with me. Let us be friends—you and me. Do you not think you would like me for a friend? What if you should take a new start in life this very day, and make a happiness for yourself which no one can take from you?"

Happy giggled. "I'm sure I don't know what you are talking about," she said. "If I was going to set out to be happy, the very first thing I'd have to do would be to run away from this house. I'm scolded, Mis' Holmes, from morning till night. There's nothing that I do, or don't do, for Mis' Stetson, but she will scold about it. I'm necessary to her happiness, I do believe, because I don't think she could live unless she had Liph and me to scold."

There was a hidden fund of humor somewhere about Happy. Her eyes gleamed roguishly for a moment as she said this. Then, apparently attempting to assume a gravity which would become the occasion, she added: "No, Mis' Holmes, I'm sure it's real nice of you to think of a girl like me, and want things to fit; but it ain't no use. Some time or other I'm going to get out of all this, and have a house of my own, and have lots of things that I ain't got now. I expect to be pretty happy then; and I guess I'll have to wait till then."

“No,” said Mrs. Holmes, earnestly. “Mark my words, if you wait until then, the happiness will not come. Do you not like to surprise people? What if you should surprise Mrs. Stetson, for instance, by doing all your work so nicely that she could not discover any thing to scold about? Have you any idea how it would make her feel?”

This at least, was in a line with Happy’s understanding, and she giggled afresh. “I never could,” she said, confidently. “You ain’t as well acquainted with that woman as I be; she’ll scold, anyhow.”

“Ah! but did you ever try it? Are you really very careful to do your work just as well as you can? Those ashes, for instance; have you been just as neat and as quick about them as you could be?”

This time there was a little shamefacedness with the laugh. “I don’t suppose I have,” she said; “and I know I ain’t quick, nor over and above neat; but, after all, what’s the use in being so dreadful particular? I hate all kinds of housework, anyhow,” she added, in a burst of confidence, and with an air which said that such a revelation ought to cover a multitude of sins.

“That isn’t of the least consequence,” said Mrs. Holmes, calmly. “I may hate to make this bed, which I have been putting in such order for the day, but it does not alter the fact that it is

my duty to make it just as neat and inviting-looking as possible; and if I fail in it, there is very little use in my trying to find satisfaction in something else. I have taught myself not to be satisfied until I have done my best. I am very much interested in you, Happy—so much that I hope you will please me by adopting my rule, just for to-day and letting me know how it works. Will you not?"

Happy hesitated, blushed and laughed. "Why, I don't know, ma'am," she said at last. "It seems dreadful queer! Let me see. What was it?"

"Oh, it is a very simple rule to repeat, but not so easy to work by. It is simply doing every thing which you have to do, just as well as you can."

"Well," said Happy, reflectively, "it's Saturday. That's the meanest day in the whole lot, because there's scrubbing the halls and stairs, and I hate scrubbing. Then there's the table to set, and the lamps to fill and trim (I do just despise lamps), and the potatoes to get ready. My! there's a lot of hateful things to do; but I don't mind trying to do the best I can, just to please you, only it won't do no good. She will scold on all the same, and nobody will know the difference."

"Yes, there will. I shall look at the stairs, as I go up and down, and I shall say: 'Ah! how

clean they are! It is a pleasure to walk over them.' And I shall notice whether the table-cloth is laid straight and smooth, and whether the knives and forks are laid neatly, or look as though they had been thrown on. As for the potatoes, if they had neither eyes nor lumps in them, it would be a real comfort to me."

"Would it now?" asked Happy, with a gleam of interest in her eyes; "well, then, I declare if I won't try at it, just for fun!"

"And, Happy, there is a thought which you have left out. Do you not know that One, of much more importance than I, will be glad if you do your work faithfully to-day?"

"Land! Mis' Holmes, I don't see why he will care; he don't eat nothing which I touch; you wipe the plate and glass that you take his things in with your own napkin—I've seen you. I think you are too dreadful nice to him for any thing! I should just think he'd like to be sick, to be took care of so."

It was a question with Mrs. Holmes whether to laugh or cry; her efforts at helping seemed to fall so far short of her hopes and plans.

"I did not mean Mr. Holmes," she said, gently, after a moment's thought; "though it is quite true that he would be glad to hear of your doing right; I was thinking of the great God. It is a wonderful thought, but nevertheless it is true,

that he has such constant and patient care over his creatures, as to be glad at any effort upon their part toward right-doing. Did you ever think of that?"

"No, ma'am," said Happy, awed at last, "I never did. Mis' Holmes, you can't mean that He cares whether I leave dirt in the corner or not!"

"I do certainly mean, my dear girl, that you cannot do even so small a bit of work as that without having the eye of God upon you, and without his approving knowledge if you are faithful."

It was very strong meat for Happy. Her conception of God would have startled and dismayed Mrs. Holmes. The two surveyed each other in silence for a moment, each busy with her own somewhat bewildered thoughts. The shrill voice of Mrs. Stetson was heard in the distance, calling to the girl, who shrugged her shoulders and nodded significantly as if to say: "I told you so. You can tell by the sound of her voice the humor she is in."

"Well," she said, preparing to move, "I'll try it anyhow, every time I can think of it this day; but I know as well as not that it won't come to nothing."

"It is as strong a degree of faith as many a Christian gets up for special efforts," Mr. Holmes said, when his wife with many merry touches to lighten the sense of pain in it all, told the story

over to him. "It is only expressed in a little bolder language than we are in the habit of using. Have you not often been startled to discover that the plain English of your resolves meant, 'I will undertake it, work at it for awhile, and see if the Lord really means what he says'? Chrissy, have you ever noticed that half-grown man, or overgrown boy, I hardly know which, who haunts the corner across the way? There is something peculiar about his face; it cannot be said to be attractive; on the contrary, one almost feels repulsion; yet I find myself looking at it, and wondering about its owner. I am afraid nobody is making the slightest effort to save him from the destruction which is almost inevitable."

"That," said Chrissy, with a gravity which her husband supposed was born of the present moment, "is Liph Stetson."

"Our landlady's son? Impossible! Why, I thought he was a little fellow."

"We imagined that from her way of speaking to him; but it is not so, and he is already far down the road which you fear he is traveling. There is a great deal of undone work in the world, Stuart."

While waiting for further opportunities Mrs. Holmes resolved not to forget the stairs. She gave them careful attention as she went down to dinner. They certainly presented a better appear-

ance than they had since she came into the house. There was still room for improvement, but an advance had been made. Slight as it was, it cheered Mrs. Holmes' heart to a degree that surprised herself. Had her hopes really taken such hold upon Happy?

The dinner table, also, was given a surveillance which a due regard to her own peace of mind had held her from, heretofore. Each knife and fork was laid with the precision of a mathematical line, and the handles were not "sticky." Inviting, the table certainly was not; poor Happy evidently did not know how to make it so; but that she had made actual effort in that direction was apparent. Certain telegraphic communications passed between the two, while Happy, in a somewhat cleaner dress, still much too "smart" for the place, and with a ribbon about the neck brighter in hue and less soiled than she had worn in the morning, waited upon the table. An expressive glance from Mrs. Holmes' eyes from her to the table and back again, made her flush with pleasure, giggle a little, and spill the water which she was pouring into Mr. Arson's glass. The further result of this was an undertone passage of words between those two, not a sentence of which Mrs. Holmes could catch; yet the bantering tones and loose familiarity upon the part of both gave her infinite anxiety. She knew enough of this evil

world to be sure that there were more dangerous thoughts for a girl like Happy than those suggested by dime novels or pink silk dresses. She knew enough already about the girl to be sure that she would be an easy victim to certain forms of temptation; notably those which had to do with dress and so-called pleasure. As for Mr. Arson, he was a young man with sandy moustache and eyebrows, who wore very fancy neckties, and had a general air about him which Mrs. Holmes translated to her husband as "jaunty."

"If he should speak in that tone to my sister Faye," she told herself, her heart throbbing indignantly the while, "I would not endure it."

"But he would not speak so to Faye," was the after-thought, which immediately demanded to be analyzed. Why would he not? Because Faye would be differently circumstanced, would wear better clothes and know how to wear them, and would be waited upon, instead of serving. Well, was it then to be admitted that the accident of what one wore, and the position one occupied in the dining-room, marked the line between respectability and — the other thing? Was a girl who did not know how to dress herself, and who was obliged to serve, at the mercy of any fast young man who chose to address her familiarly?

These were some of the indignant thoughts which floated through Mrs. Holmes' mind. She

could not be said to be considering them; they did not take definite shape enough for that; and she was aware that there was a marked difference between the neatly-clothed, self-respecting girl who served, and this tawdry, ignorant simpleton; nevertheless, her sense of decency resented the thought that the simpleton should be in danger. Her mind once roused to the question, she recalled the fact that there had often been low-toned, jesting words between these two, and shy glances, and almost winks, which would indicate that there was some sort of understanding between them.

All things considered, she succeeded in working herself into a degree of anxiety about Happy which would have bewildered that young person.

An anxiety not lessened by an episode which occurred that evening. She was standing on her upper piazza, shielded from view by the vines and the darkness. Her husband had retired, and she, after making last arrangements for the night, had come out to the strangeness of balmy December air to get a few breaths of sweetness, and wonder at the contrast between this and the Decembers of her past. Suddenly, mingling with the odor of pines and roses, there floated up to her the sound of voices.

“Now that I have brought you safely home, I think you might give a fellow a good-night kiss.”

An unmistakable little giggle responded; then, in a voice which could only be Happy's:

"I sha'n't do any such thing; you needn't to have brought me home; I knew the way."

"You are very cruel. What harm could it do to reward me after I tore myself away from the news-room on purpose to take a walk with you? I'll tell you what is the matter. You are afraid of that severe-eyed woman who sits opposite me. I saw her looking at you and making motions of some sort this afternoon. If she sets you against me, I shall hate her; remember that."

More giggling.

"You are too funny for any thing! What do you suppose Mis' Holmes knows about you? She ain't never spoke a word about you. What she said was about something else, and wasn't like your kind of talk at all."

"I presume likely. What has she been saying to you? I wish she would let you alone; I don't want you spoiled. Come now, tell me just what she said. I know it was something about me, because you were in such a hurry to deny it."

"It wasn't either, and I sha'n't tell you a word she said; it was a secret between her and me."

The denials were prompt enough, but the tone said, as plainly as words could, that poor, silly Happy was flattered by her companion's evident

desire to know about her affairs, and that she was excessively amused by the entire interview.

“A secret!” repeated the man, whom Chrissy had some time before decided was Mr. Arson. “Who would have supposed that you would have begun already to have secrets which you will not confide to me! That shows the utter cruelty of a woman’s heart, especially a young woman’s. Now, you really will have to give me a kiss to atone for this.”

A sort of struggle ensued, to judge by the sound, mingled with much half-stifled laughter on the part of the girl, in the midst of which the listener on the piazza fled in dismay and almost in despair. What had she taken hold of? What horrid possibilities it involved, and how was she ever to accomplish results? Yet certainly she must not stand still and see that miserable girl ruined before her eyes! If only Stuart were well! It was the refrain which in these days closed all her perplexities.

CHAPTER VI.

SHE HOLDS A MEETING.

NOT even yet were the experiences of the day concluded. The water in Mrs. Holmes' pitcher was low. It was one of Happy's many forgetfulnesses, this almost empty pitcher. If Stuart should have a restless night, and need a drink of water frequently, as he did sometimes, there would not be enough. She resolved upon going herself in search of a fresh supply.

The back part of the house was deserted and dark; Happy had by this time vanished into the far-off regions of the third story, and Mrs. Holmes, slowly feeling her way through the comparatively unknown passage, nearly stumbled against a dark object which was moving along from the other direction. Stifling the inclination to scream, she had decided who the intruder must be before he had drawled out :

“You needn't be scairt; it is only me.”

“And this is ‘only me,’ Mrs. Holmes,” said

that lady, with a little laugh; "you are Mrs. Stetson's son, I think. Could you help me to fill this pitcher with fresh water? Happy has forgotten it."

"She's good at that," the boy said, grimly; "better at it than any thing else. I don't know why ma don't git rid of her; she's a noosance."

Several times had Mrs. Holmes tried vaguely to plan what she should say to Liph Stetson, in case opportunity should be given her to speak to him; certainly she had never planned that the conversation should take the shape which it now did.

"Do you know who it was with Happy on the side piazza a moment ago?" she asked, with a sudden hope that she might have been deceived, and the man would prove to be an honest admirer of the silly girl, with possibly a right even to sue for the sort of good-night which he had demanded.

"Yaas," said Liph, "that was Nick Arson; he boards here; he is makin' believe to be mighty sweet on Happy just now."

Mrs. Holmes controlled any outward exhibition of the utter repulsion with which she shrank from such coarseness, and merely questioned meekly:

"What kind of a man is this Mr. Arson?"

"Oh, he's a clerk in a store here. I don't know much about him; he's quality, you see."

“Liph,” said Mrs. Holmes, looking full at the boy by the light of a smoky kerosene lamp which he had produced from somewhere, “is he the kind of man with whom you would like to have your young sister stand and talk, if you had a sister?”

“Well, he just isn’t! You can bet your life on it,” said Liph, with sudden energy, pumping fiercely while he spoke.

“Then, why do you not try to influence Happy not to place herself in such danger? It is true she is not your sister, but God made you both, and will hold you responsible for the influence which you ought to exert over each other.”

Liph held the arm of the pump aloft, and stared in the most profound astonishment. It seemed doubtful whether he could believe his ears; it was so amazing a thing to hear such words addressed to him.

“Me!” he said at last, with explosive energy. “What fool kind of talk is that? Have you any notion in life that she would pay any attention to what I say? And what do I care about her, anyhow?”

Over the first part of this sentence Mrs. Holmes reflected. Certainly nothing seemed less probable than that Happy would pay the slightest attention to the opinions of this young wreck of humanity; low in the scale of civilization as she was, she would be sure to put herself infinitely

above Liph Stetson, and the looker-on was obliged to confess that she was correct in her estimate. However ignorant Happy might be, she had at least kept what little sense she had unclouded by the fumes of tobacco or alcohol, and Liph's breath suggested both. But this was not the conclusion to make apparent to him.

"The point is not what you care about her, but what you ought to be able to do for her. Do you not know that a young motherless girl in your mother's house ought to be able to look to you for protection from outside dangers, for advice as to what is, and what is not, wise for her to do? And for a dozen other kindnesses, such as a self-respecting young man can offer to a friendless girl under his mother's protection?"

Liph's face was a study. There were times when he did not know whether to burst into a volley of angry oaths, or to sneer or to laugh over such tremendous words spoken to him.

He was a "self-respecting" young man! Who had imagined for a moment that such words applied to him? Happy under his mother's protection! Happy was his mother's drudge; ill-paid, ill-treated, and yet deserving, in his opinion, nothing more than she received. Happy paying the slightest attention to his advice, supposing for the moment he was fool enough to offer her any!

"That beats all the talk I ever heard!" he said

sullenly, filling the pitcher, and pouring a generous quantity of the liquid on the floor at the same time; "you've got hold of the wrong fellow; I ain't one of them kind, and never was. Happy ain't nothing to me, and if she was I couldn't help it. I've gone to ruin myself; if you don't believe it, ask ma," and for a moment a savage leer spread over his face. "Nick Arson is a gentleman. He goes with the style girls in this town. Ma is always pointing him out to me as an example. But it is true enough for all that, that if I had a sister and cared any thing for her, I'd lock her up in the meanest shed in this town, and keep her there, before I'd let her go around with him. But she ain't my sister, and I ain't nobody, and that's all there is of it. There's your pitcher of water."

He did not add, "Take it and be off"—at least, not in words, but he turned away, and was shambling out of sight when Mrs. Holmes found voice again.

"Liph, wait a moment; I want to say one more word to you. It is very easy for you to stand there and tell me that Happy is nothing to you, and that you have gone to ruin, and all that sort of thing; but I believe you know, in spite of what you have said, that you are responsible in the sight of God. If Happy should lose her soul, because you did not try to save her, it will not

help you in the least to remember that you have lost your own. If, as you say, you are on the road to ruin, the more shame to you; a young man has no right to go to ruin. A hundred times over, the only son of his mother, and she a widow, has no right to ruin his life and hers. I don't know that anybody ever spoke such words to you before; but I cannot help it, they ought to be said. It is folly for you to imagine that because you own yourself worthless, and without influence over those whom you ought to be able to influence, therefore you are free from responsibility. If you were going to ruin and did not know it, it would be pitiful enough, but not so solemn as to move right along on the same path with your eyes open."

She was amazed at her words. Thinking them over afterward, they did not seem to be the ones she ought to have said to him. She could not help feeling that many of them were above his comprehension, and that some phrases were, perhaps, too like the ones which his mother so constantly flung at him to be productive of any good. Yet her tone and manner had been most unlike his mother's. She had spoken low, and with slow and solemn emphasis. She had longed to make him think. He had stood still and looked at her in a kind of stupid wonderment. He still stood, after she had traversed the long passage with her

heavy pitcher, and glanced back at him; stood just where she had left him, like one dazed. On the whole, responsibilities seemed thickening around the young woman who had meant to fold her hands so resolutely, and wait. She set her pitcher down softly, so as not to waken the sleeper, and went out on the piazza in the starlight again. Liph and his mother, and Happy, and Nick Arson, and Mrs. Carpenter and her husband—what a world! Six such people to loom up before her mental horizon but the day after she had declared on paper that she knew no one, and meant to know no one, in this portion of the earth. “God’s earth,” she said to herself softly, “and ‘lost souls,’ as Stuart said. Can it be possible that my Father means me to save them? He must certainly mean me to try. But what can I do?”

Out there in the night and the loneliness, the work looked almost hopeless, the cases desperate; but Stuart’s philosophy in regard to it surprised her a little.

“My dear, what can you expect?” he asked coolly, when she told him with a horrified face about the sentences she had overheard between Mr. Arson and Happy. “For the man, I grant you, it is despicable enough; he is undoubtedly what that precious youth, Liph, considers him, but poor Happy may be as innocent as many another

silly victim often is. You say her mother died when she was a child, and it is evident that she has had no bringing up, save that which Mrs. Stetson and dime novels have given her. I think it quite probable that she supposes all fine ladies are treated by fine gentlemen precisely as Arson tried to treat her. You think her instinctive sense of delicacy ought to have come to her aid. It did somewhat, it seems, or there would have been no resistance, unless, indeed, the show of resistance is a part of the dime novel education.

“What I mean, Chrissy, dear,” he said, stopping with a half-laugh at her horrified face, and then beginning again, “what I am trying to do is simply to reassure you. Happy is not utterly depraved and hopeless because she is ignorant of the commonest proprieties of life. What would be almost hopeless if permitted by a young woman trained as you have been, becomes another matter when a poor girl of that sort is under consideration. In other words, dear wife, while there is but one standard of right, there are many grades of sin, and the environments and opportunities of the sinning soul will undoubtedly be taken into account. Do not be utterly cast down over poor Happy because she does not know how to conduct herself in the presence of a so-called gentleman; there is a sense in which it is not any stranger

than that she does not know how to order her hair or her dress."

I do not think it can really be said that our young endeavorer was glad that Mrs. Carpenter fell sick, but inasmuch as such was the case she did rejoice over the opportunity which it gave her. The more she thought about that sad woman's life, the more sure she felt that there was a pent-up bitterness of some sort which it would help her to have uncovered.

"She is rebellious over something," was the thought which always closed Mrs. Holmes' talks with her husband upon this subject. "There is a hidden wound which gnaws all the time at her life. If I could only find her heart, perhaps I could help her."

So I think she heard with even a little sense of relief that Mrs. Carpenter was sick in bed, and could not "do" her clothes that week.

"I am going to see her," she said promptly to Stuart. "It helps me to think that she will not be ironing. I have associated her so entirely with the swift passes of that inevitable iron that it some way haunts me like an ugly black weight which is a part of her. To think of her as in bed, weak and helpless, seems to humanize her."

"What sort of a bed has she to lie on?" her husband asked, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders, and added: "The beds of the poor

always impress me as almost the bitterest drop in their cup of poverty ; worse than the eating."

"The bed will be clean," said Chrissy ; "for the rest I cannot answer."

It was this thought which made her add to her basket of supplies a down pillow in its delicate, frilled whiteness, and a bottle of lavender water surrounded by fine old linen handkerchiefs. She could not imagine herself as daring to offer to bathe that set white face ; but if headache were an accompaniment, it might be possible to accomplish so much in the way of soothing.

The doctor set her down at the door, lifting out her basket for her, and carrying it to the top step of the small piazza, with a whimsical look on his handsome young face, as he said : "The good Samaritan going in search of a sorely wounded creature who, if I mistake not, will nevertheless refuse the mollifying ointment, and insist upon suffering in grim solitude. I know something of this *protégé* of yours, Mrs. Holmes. I consider her as hopeless a case as we have in this little city ; and that is saying a good deal."

She turned toward him eagerly. "You know her ? Then tell me what it is which has so deadened her life. Is it only because she has a miserable, worthless husband ?"

"Oh, no," he said, mockingly ; "that is the merest trifle, of course, not worthy of a sensible

woman's consideration. I am surprised that you should have thought of such a thing; it is something much worse than that."

Mrs. Holmes laughed a little and blushed, as she answered: "I deserve your sarcasm, doctor, for using the word 'only' in such a connection. It must have seemed very strange to you. Still, with explanations, I mean it. Given even such a sorrow, if there is no self-reproach connected with it, I can conceive of a woman enduring and suffering, yet hoping and praying every hour; and keeping her heart from hardening, though it may almost break; but this woman seems to me to have turned to stone."

Dr. Portland laid aside his mocking tone and regarded her with respect. "I can conceive of such women, too," he said; "but Mrs. Carpenter is not one of them. I do not think she prays any oftener than I do myself. I doubt whether she would know how, any better than I should. Oh, I know very little about her; nothing at all of her past. Her poor wretch of a husband called me, once, when she was suffering, and I did what I could for her, and offended her, I think; at least she will not see me now, though a neighbor tried to persuade her into it last night. Her husband is a miserable scamp; but, tucked in somewhere behind the rags and tobacco juice, he has a remnant of a heart; and really, of the two lives,

I should be almost as willing to stand my chances beside him as her. These stone women are harder to manage than any other. But I must not prejudice you."

During this conversation they had been standing, waiting for Mrs. Holmes' gentle knock to be answered. Mr. Holmes, whom the doctor was taking with him for a ride into the country, was sitting back among the cushions of the carriage, reins in hand. His wife glanced toward him anxiously; this long waiting must be wearying to him.

"It cannot be there is any one with her," she said, "and she may be asleep. Would you go in, without further ceremony?"

"I certainly should. After putting your hand to so trying a plow as this, it will not do to draw back. I will take good care of your husband, and bring him home in a state to appreciate your good offices as nurse, since you will probably fail of that part here."

And with a gay, mocking smile, he lifted his hat and left her.

She gave him one swift, anxious thought before she went in to the task before her.

CHAPTER VII.

SHE ATTEMPTS TO SYMPATHIZE.

THIS cultured young physician had been such a blessing to them! Her heart swelled with gratitude whenever she thought of his steady unfailing care and thoughtfulness. His skillful management of her husband's case had borne testimony to the truth of the recommendation which their own family physician at home had given her in his letter of introduction: "I have not seen my old friend and pupil, Dr. Portland, in several years, but I have kept watch of him, and he is proving to be what I thought him in college—a genius in his profession. Do not fear to place implicit trust in his skill and faithfulness."

It had taken her but a few days to learn to do so. Short as their acquaintance had been, both her husband and herself were learning to regard Dr. Portland as perhaps their only intimate friend in a land of strangers. Yet nothing was plainer than that he had no personal acquaintance with

the Friend who was more to these two than all others. There was a dash of irreverence in all that he said about religious matters, and a vein of mockery often running through the gay language in which he referred to the different phases of Christian work in which they were interested. Here, too, was a field, the Christian woman thought, which ought to be occupied for Christ; but she felt that she knew less how to reach a man of his stamp than even Liph Stetson, who would answer for the opposite pole of humanity, so far as culture was concerned. "He is not at all like Chess Gardner," she told her husband; "Chess never really mocked at sacred things. In his sacred heart he respected them; but Dr. Portland gives me the impression that it is only the environments of propriety which keep him from downright mockery."

But there was no more time to think of Dr. Portland. She had let herself into the large, bare room, which looked even barer than usual, with the ironing-board hiding its white face against the wall, and the irons standing glum and cold upon the unused stove. Some plain dark calico curtains, which had hidden something from view on Mrs. Holmes' previous visits, were drawn aside, and revealed a dreary-looking bed, covered with a dark calico spread. Underneath this covering lay Mrs. Carpenter, her hair drawn back as uncom-

promisingly as ever, and her eyes looking larger and colder, if any thing, than they had when she stood and ironed. Plainly she was very far from being asleep, yet she had not chosen to respond to the knock.

“Good afternoon,” ventured Mrs. Holmes. “I took the liberty of coming in uninvited, because I thought you might be alone, and asleep. I am very sorry that you are sick.”

“Are you?” said Mrs. Carpenter; “so am I. I shall have to disappoint all my customers this week, I suppose. I have no doubt they will be sorry for me — or think they are.”

She moved her head restlessly while she spoke, and the one small pillow, rolled into a fierce little wad under it, looked so uncomfortable that Mrs. Holmes drew out her down one.

“Your head aches, does it not — and is hot? Let me put this cool little pillow under it. Mr. Holmes thinks it has a soothing effect sometimes; and I brought some lavender water with me, in case you had a headache; that is very cooling, you know.”

There was a very perceptible shrinking from the small white pillow, as though coming in contact with it gave the woman positive pain. Mrs. Holmes felt sure she would have refused it utterly if she could have found words soon enough; but by this time the cool, trained hand of the self-

constituted nurse was making swift passes over the hot forehead, leaving a trail of coolness and delicate odor.

"You are very good," said Mrs. Carpenter, "but it is not necessary to take all that trouble for me. I am not used to it, and it is a waste of sentiment. It ought to be kept for people who know how to be grateful. I do not."

"Never mind the gratitude," said her nurse, cheerily; "we will give attention just now to the ache, and to some other matters. I think it quite probable that you need some nourishment. What did you have for dinner?"

"Spoiled fish-balls, the last dinner I ate," said the sick woman, promptly. "I haven't eaten any in two days. However, they were not more spoiled than most things are which come out of tin cans. We live in tin cans down here, you know, sealed up codfish and milk and every thing—even sentiment—and if any of it is exposed to outside influences it spoils."

There was nothing amusing in this sentence. There was not even the slightest attempt to be amusing. Cold, dreary sarcasm was evidently what was intended. The genial woman bending over the speaker felt her heart shiver under its influence. Nevertheless, she controlled herself, and spoke bravely.

"I should recommend some beef broth for a

change, and fortunately I put into my basket a bottle of some which I made fresh to-day for my husband. I brought my little spirit-lamp along also, to heat it on, for the day is so warm I thought you might not have any fire."

While she spoke she busied herself in getting out the bottle and lamp, and a delicate china cup, tinted in pale blue. Mrs. Carpenter watched her with severe eyes. "Mrs. Holmes," she said at last, "there isn't the slightest need for that, and I wish you wouldn't. If you think you make me more comfortable doing it, you don't. I would much rather be let alone; I'm not used to being taken care of; I have had no care since I was a young girl, and I never expect any again. I don't want it. All I ask of this world is a chance to work, and to be let alone."

Over the first part of this ungracious sentence Mrs. Holmes had flushed and hesitated. Was there any use in trying to force kindness upon one who refused it with such persistent rudeness? But one thing gave her courage. In the sentence, "since I was a young girl," there had been the slightest perceptible break in the speaker's voice, and there came to the listener a swift knowledge of the fact that some tender memory was stirred, whether the woman would or not.

"How do I know what dark story has frozen her poor heart?" she asked herself.

“Now,” she said presently, quite as though the woman had not spoken at all, “it is all ready, and I know it will do you good, because Mr. Holmes said it was the best I had made yet; and he is a judge. Will you let me feed it to you, or would you like to sit up and wait upon yourself?”

Much as though she were a victim to circumstances over which she had no control, Mrs. Carpenter, with a half-disdainful gesture, raised herself on one elbow and drained the hot liquid with a few rapid swallows. Yet Mrs. Holmes could not be sure whether it was all fierceness, or in part starvation, for the want of proper food.

“I will give you some more in a little while,” she said, as graciously as though the recipient had responded with grateful words and smiles.

Suddenly there came another knock at the door, followed by the swift entrance of a young woman with a basket in her hand.

“I beg your pardon,” she said, stopping midway; “I thought, of course, you were alone, and I brought you a little rice; it was the only decent thing I could get hold of.”

“Come in, Mad,” said Mrs. Carpenter, with more show of humanity in her voice than Mrs. Holmes had heard before; “I didn’t expect you, because I did not think you would be able to accomplish it; rice is nourishing, I suppose, and that is what I need to help me get back to my

work. Great business for me to break down, right in the middle of the week! I never did such a thing before."

"Flesh and blood will not stand every thing," said the girl; "though you try hard enough to make them. Will you have the rice now, or"—She glanced hesitatingly at Mrs. Holmes and the china cup. That young woman came forward courteously; if she must be the hostess on this occasion, she was ready.

"I gave her a few spoonfuls of quite strong beef tea," she said, sweetly, "all I thought it wise to let her have at first. The doctor has me give it to my husband in small quantities and frequently; but I should think a little rice might be good for her, if she would relish it."

"I detest it!" said the woman on the bed.

The two guests looked at each other and smiled; from that moment they felt introduced.

"Mad knows I hate rice," said Mrs. Carpenter, "and she knows that I have to eat it; just as she and I both have to eat and wear and do things all the time that we hate. This is Madeline Hurst, Mrs. Holmes."

The two, thus introduced, exchanged bows and smiles again. The girl flushed in an embarrassed way. She looked as though she knew what proper introductions were, and might have resented this one had she thought it worth while.

She had bright black eyes, which had twinkled appreciatively once or twice, but which Mrs. Holmes decided could sparkle with another kind of feeling on occasion. She had black hair, also, and the sharp features which indicate intensity of character in some directions. Mrs. Holmes found herself studying the girl curiously.

"It is another type still," said this bewildered woman to herself; "I cannot help being interested in her; but I cannot place her. What an extraordinary name to call her! 'Mad!' I wonder if it is chosen because of its fitness?"

The girl did not give her much time for studying character. She bent over Mrs. Carpenter, said a few words in a low tone, went to the little corner cupboard, emptied her basket, and, with a promise to look in to-morrow if she could, hurried away.

"Poor Mad!" said Mrs. Carpenter, looking after her with a gleam of something like sympathy in her face; "we are kindred spirits in a way, though there is such disparity in our ages and positions; we both live miserable lives, and that makes a sort of bond between us."

"Who is she?" Mrs. Holmes inquired with interest.

"She is an orphan, and lives with her brother; he is a pussy kind of man, ruled by his wife; and his wife is—well, she is what a woman can be

who chooses to be hateful; and she chooses exactly that, where Mad is concerned. She leads the girl a miserable life. I wouldn't endure it; I tell Mad so; I would run away or drown myself, or do something desperate. She isn't bound by any law nonsense, and could go if she would. I hate slavery, though you might not think it."

Mrs. Holmes shivered visibly. What a thing it was to have the girl, who could not be much over twenty, influenced by this unhappy, disappointed woman.

"What does the girl have to trouble her?" she asked, gently, with a feeling that it might ease Mrs. Carpenter's own sore trouble to talk about another's pain.

"Every thing that a woman—mistress of her house, and hating the other woman who has to make her home with her—can produce. If you cannot imagine what sort of a life that would be, you are fortunate. She is sneered at, and mocked at, and bullied—that's the only word for it—every hour in the day. According to her sister-in-law, she never by any possibility does any thing right. She is complained of to the woman's friends, or to strangers for that matter, if her precious sister happens to get a chance to talk to them. She is declared to be utterly selfish, deceitful and unprincipled in every way. There is not a mean or hateful thing that she is not

capable of doing. Why, my life is comfortable compared with that child's! She is an unutterable fool to stand it. Even I can afford to be sorry for her, and when it comes to that it is something! Mad is no saint, but she is a thousand times better than her sweet sister-in-law would have you to believe."

"Why does the brother permit such treatment of his sister?" Mrs. Holmes inquired.

"Because, as I told you, he is a pussy-cat man. Mrs. Hurst arranges all these things. He sits meekly by, and does as he is told. Oh, they are not my kind of people. They are eminently respectable. He is an officer in the church, bless you, and she is a leading member when it comes to fairs and sociables, and such things. They live on one of the good streets in a good house, and wouldn't be seen coming to Mrs. Carpenter's door except to get some washing done! One of Mad's sins is that she has low tastes, and is willing to associate with low-down people, meaning me. Poor Mad likes to escape over here sometimes. There are times, I think, when she even envies me."

"There are harder lots in life than yours," said her guest boldly, busying herself with another portion of beef tea while she spoke. "I know, dear madam, that that sounds unsympathetic, but it is true. Think what it would be if you were

not able to keep every thing clean and neat about you. I feel sure that would distress you, yet I have known women who did not understand how to compass such a state of things, and were miserable in consequence."

It was but a poor little crumb of comfort. She could hardly blame the sick woman for letting her lip curl in a hard, sarcastic smile over the thought that there was nothing for her to be glad about but a bare, desolate, clean room!

"I know," the comforter went on hurriedly, "what a dreadful disappointment your life must be. Do not think I do not understand, and in a sense appreciate it. To have one's husband"—

She stopped in unutterable confusion. Certainly she was treading on dangerous ground. Nothing but a desperate desire to help, could have made her do it. She would not have blamed Mrs. Carpenter if her face had flushed angrily. But to see, instead, that mocking smile was almost more than she could bear.

"Go on," said Mrs. Carpenter, still with that terrible smile upon her face; "to see one's husband a brute, a sot, a miserable, staggering old hulk, who does not know even enough to keep himself decently clean! Is that what you were going to say? You see I have spared you the description. I understand the details so well! but I want to hear the rest. What would you do

really, do you think, if we were to change places? Do you fancy you would clasp your hands in thankfulness because you were able to scrub your floor?"

How was such a question to be answered? The guest felt her face crimson with shame for the disgrace and horror of it all. To what depths of degradation must a woman have been brought who could speak to a stranger in this way of the husband of her youth! She resisted the temptation to say that however low her husband had fallen, she would try to remember that she bore his name, and had made certain promises concerning him. This woman was ill, and she wanted to help her. The first step was to be patient with the frenzy which was an outgrowth of her misery. Before she could determine what reply to make, and while Mrs. Carpenter was regarding her with that mocking smile, there came an interruption. A shuffle, rather than a step, was heard outside.

The whole aspect of the woman changed. She turned her head toward the door in a listening attitude. In place of the hard smile had come a look of intense scorn mingled with disgust. Suddenly she spoke in a half whisper:

"Bolt that door, quick!"

In an instant Mrs. Holmes was at the door, her face pale with terror, and had pushed the bolt. Just in time, for an uncertain hand was already fumbling with the knob.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHE IS DISMAYED AND DISCOMFITED.

THEN a man's voice was heard in expostulation:

"Oh, come, Jane, let me in, I'm in a dreadful state. I've had an accident, and am as wet as a drowned rat. I shall catch my death of cold if you don't let me in. Come, Jane; I won't muss any thing up; I'll just get something dry, and go out again."

There was no response from the woman on the bed, and no change on her dark face.

"You reached the door just in time," she said to Mrs. Holmes; "I'm much obliged to you for that at least."

"Are you afraid of him?" asked Mrs. Holmes, in a frightened whisper.

"Afraid!" The words seemed to explode from Mrs. Carpenter's lips, rather than be uttered by her. "What should I be afraid of? He wouldn't

dare touch me with his little finger, even if he wanted to."

"But he is—that is—is he not"—and then she stopped in pain and shame again. How could she ask a woman if her husband, who stood outside, pleading for admittance, was intoxicated?

"Oh, yes, he's drunk enough," said the woman calmly; "and wet and muddy, and every thing else that's revolting. Faugh! But he's never ugly, even at his worst; not to me, at least. He wouldn't dare to be. As to that, I don't think he ever has any wish to be. I will give even him his due. I suppose that is another thing for which I ought to be thankful, isn't it?" and the shadow of that mocking smile hovered about her face again. "But I'm not, I assure you. There have been times when I have thought if he would take me by the shoulder, and turn me out of the house, or kick me out, I could have a touch of sympathy for him. I can understand the devil when he takes hold of a soul in such ways, but driveling idiots are beyond my endurance. I believe in the devil, you see; if ever a woman had reason to, I have. Oh, you will find me very orthodox, in some respects."

Mrs. Holmes felt her whole soul shrink away from this terrible woman. The poor wretch at the door seemed more human than she.

"Why do you not let him in," she asked coldly,

“if you are not afraid? It may be your duty. If the man is really wet and chilled, a life may be at stake. I will find for him what he needs, if you will direct me, then unfasten the door and retire.”

“But I shall not direct you, and I will not let that drunken wretch into this room to-day; not if I have to crawl out of bed and fight it out myself. I can do it. I went to bed for prudence’ sake, because I knew I should not be able to do your fine ironing very soon unless I did; but I could get up if I had to.”

Mrs. Holmes answered not a word. The outsider had apparently already abandoned his efforts and staggered feebly away, making, as he went, a sort of dreary whimper, as an ill-used animal might have done. An inexpressible horror filled the soul of one of the listeners; it seemed to her that she felt afraid, not of the drunken man, but of his wife. She looked toward the bolted door, with an impulse to open it and flee away, leaving this lost soul to herself. Yet the terrible look on the woman’s face, and the glare in her eyes, said plainly that she was sick and suffering.

“She may not know what she is saying,” thought her visitor; “half of the horror of this scene may be owing to the delirium of fever. I ought not to leave her alone in such a state; but oh, I wish Dr. Portland had been going to return this way! I should certainly call him in.”

In silence she poured out and administered the beef tea once more, standing silently by while the contents of the cup were being drained again and pronounced very good.

“I can feel that it is giving me strength,” said Mrs. Carpenter, as she returned the cup; “and I am obliged to you, though I’ve almost forgotten how to express such feelings.”

Voice and manner were quieter than they had been. After a moment’s silence, during which her visitor was wondering what arrangements could be made for the night, she spoke again in the calm, cold tone which belonged to the ironer at her board :

“I have alarmed you by my fierceness this afternoon, I suppose. I do not often go on in this way, but I have suffered just enough to make me lose self-control; it made me wild to think of that man coming near me to-night; when I am well and can go out of the house and sit on the doorstep, or can draw the chair to the further corner of the room and sit in it, I leave him in peaceable possession of the bed; but share the room with him to-night I will not.”

The young and happy wife listened with eyes dilating in horror. What a life was that to live! To shrink in loathing from the one whose name she bore, who should have had a right to claim at her hand all that sacred love and tenderness could give.

“And he is your husband!” she thought aloud, rather than said the words.

The face on the bed darkened.

“Yes, he is. Do not remind me of it, if you please; there is no need; I never for a moment forget it. Mrs. Holmes, I hate shams of all sorts; at the risk of horrifying you even more than I have already done, I mean to speak out; I do not often; I live in an awful silence, but you have tried to be good to me; that is why I am going to speak. I hate that man who was fumbling like an imbecile at the door a short time ago; no other word will express the feeling I have for him; I hate him! Why I stay and slave for him, and live the life I do, instead of going back where I came from, is owing to my miserable Puritan training. I have a sort of feeling that it is not respectable for a woman to desert her husband, and go away to what she was before she knew him, if that were possible. I have no near friends, no one in the world for whom I really care, when it comes to that, but I have acquaintances by the score, and the demon of respectability has gotten hold of them and me; it is more respectable in their eyes, and it always was in mine, to live on in the way one has chosen rather than to desert it. That is why I do it. But I thought it would save you trouble, and me talk, if you understood plainly at the beginning

that you could not do any thing for me, and might as well leave me to my fate. I hate it, and him, and always expect to. If it were respectable, I should kill him, but it is not considered so, you know, and I have no fear of doing it."

Was there any answer which ought to be made to such wild and sinful words? Mrs. Holmes tried to think, and to steady her heart, so that she might speak quietly. The words which her husband had spoken about the transforming power of God's Spirit recurred to her, the more forcibly because she began to realize, as never before, that only God's Spirit could transform such lives as this.

"Do you forget," she said, in a voice of studied quietness, "that there is a possibility of all this being changed? That there is a Power which could make, not only your husband, but yourself, into new beings; could give you back, indeed, the love and trust which belonged to the early days of your life together? Oh, Mrs. Carpenter, you asked me what I would do if we had to change places; I know how little I can realize what the horror and terror must be, but I do know I would do one thing: if I had never learned to pray, I would make it my first lesson; then I would pray, pray, day and night that God would take hold of my husband, as his power alone could do, and make him again the husband whom I loved and

chose from all the world. Such things have been done, madam, you must know it; and they may be again."

She had not awakened even a shadow of tender memory, though the woman could not have been married much more than a decade. Instead, there was the horror of that wretched smile.

"That is very good logic," she said, "with one exception — your premises are wrong; there never was any such time as the one to which you so feelingly refer."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Holmes.

"I mean that I did not marry for sentiment; in plain English, I did not pretend to love the man I married."

"Then why did you marry him?" The questioner's face was pale and stern; her life had been sheltered from such women as this. Except in third-rate novels, she had not realized that they were to be found.

"For a home!" said Mrs. Carpenter, with a sardonic smile; "for the comforts of life, for the respectability of the married state! Have I not told you several times that New England women will do any thing for respectability? Surely you can understand the motive! Do you not see what a lovely home he has prepared for me and how my life is sheltered? I needed a protector, you know; I was a poor lonely girl, drudging in a

country school to support myself ; and I was tired of it. There was nobody to care for me, or do for me, if I fell sick. I was at the mercy of aunts and cousins who considered me a nuisance ; and, in short, I did as hundreds of other girls do ; only I never pretended that it was for love."

"And you profess to hate shams !"

Perhaps it was the tone, rather than the words, which made Mrs. Carpenter's face flush.

"Yes," she said, presently, "I do, and am honest in it. Have I not told you there was no pretense of any thing but a business transaction?"

"Upon the part of both?" asked Mrs. Holmes, solemnly.

"No," after a scarcely perceptible hesitation ; "I will be honest in that, too. He thought he preferred me to all the world. I have no doubt he was sincere, and you see how much it has amounted to. What am I, compared to a bottle of whisky, or even to a quid of tobacco?"

But the disgust in her face was responded to only by stern dignity on the part of her questioner.

"Was there, then, no marriage ceremony?"

The woman on the bed glared on her in such a way that, had she been in less terrible earnest, she might have been frightened.

"What do you mean?" was the short, sharp question.

"Just what I say. Was there no marriage cer-

emony performed by God's appointed servant, at which time you, having called upon God to witness, vowed to love and honor the man of your choice until death parted you? How dare you say there was no deception, when you remember that?"

The region where this woman's conscience ought to have been was touched at last. The flush on her face began to die out, leaving a gray pallor, but her voice was as firm as ever.

"Honor!" she said, in fine scorn; "that is an expressive word to use to me; remember, there were two to make the promise. What has become of the pledge to 'love, honor and cherish' me? How could even God expect me to honor such a wretch as he has become?"

"All that has nothing to do with the question," Mrs. Holmes said, firmly.

She was amazed at herself. She did not understand how she had the courage to speak such words; she knew that in quieter moments she would question the wisdom of having begun this conversation at such a time, but, having begun it, it seemed to her of infinite importance that the woman should hear the truth.

"That has nothing to do with the question," she said, firmly; "your husband must answer to God, for his broken vows, and so must you; whether you are able to have the right feeling for

him now or not does not alter the fact that, unless you had it then, you took lying words upon your lips, disgraced your womanhood by one of the most terrible shams of which a soul can be guilty. By your own confession, Mrs. Carpenter, the husband whom you despise was less guilty than you."

The sick woman sat up, and began to twist, and put back into place her long black hair, from which the hair-pins had fallen. The red glow had come back to her cheeks, but her voice and manner were quiet enough.

"I wish you would have the goodness to go away," she said, with cutting dignity; "go away and leave me alone; you mean well, but you don't know what you are talking about. I saw from the very first that your intentions were commendable; you meant to try to do me good; I felt almost sorry for you, because I knew better than you did what a hopeless errand yours was. You haven't succeeded, and never will; you do not know how. I would advise you as a friend to confine your efforts to the pretty girls, and red-cheeked, well-dressed boys, who are playing at life. You may understand enough about that sort of life to influence them, but a hundred years of such talk as you have been giving me would do no good, would do only harm; not even with the beef tea thrown in, and I don't deny that it was good. But until

you learn that you have no right to go into a miserable woman's house and insult her, you would do well to keep out of it. All I ask of you is to let me alone. I am glad of the chance to do your ironing, because you pay well and promptly, and I am not afraid that you will run away in the night, leaving an unpaid bill, which is what some of your fine ladies are equal to. I have a higher opinion of you than you have of me, for to that extent I trust you; but at least I am frank in this, I want nothing more to do with you; I hope never to see your face again."

"I beg you to lie down," said Mrs. Holmes, regarding the sick woman with keen anxiety, "I am sorry if I hurt you; I ought not at this time to have spoken as I did. You are quite right, I have very little experience with sick people; if you will only lie down and be quiet, I will leave you at once."

It was evident that her presence was exciting the unhappy woman to a pitch which might perhaps be beyond her control. Trembling in every nerve with excitement and terrible disappointment, Mrs. Holmes made haste to gather together her belongings, slip the bolt and disappear.

Once out of the house, she breathed more freely. Surely the sick woman could hardly be so glad to get rid of her as she was to go. Yet she was obliged to assure herself that she had a

long walk to take through one of the main streets of the town, and that she must by no means break down and cry, at least until she reached the shelter of her own room. What a horrible failure she had made! How utterly foolish in her to speak as she did to a woman wild with pain and misery!

"I should not have noticed what she said any more than I would the ravings of a lunatic," she told herself, yet there was an undertone conviction that Mrs. Carpenter knew only too well what she was talking about, and had revealed the wretched truth. What was now to be done? To leave her alone in her helpless state, without even the care of the husband whom she had driven from her, was not to be thought of. Yet who was there that could be summoned to her aid? There were neighbors, it is true, but Mrs. Holmes knew none of them, and the glimpses she had had of those nearest at hand did not incline her to hope much from their ministrations.

"She cannot surely stay there alone," said this much-troubled Endeavorer; "her husband may not return to-night, or, if he does, it may be much worse for her in her present state than if he had stayed away. I wonder if there is any thing which that poor Madeline Hurst can do? I passed a house not very far from here with that name on the door; I wonder if it can be where she lives?"

CHAPTER IX.

SHE REACHES AFTER THEM.

MADÉLINE HURST was in the dining-room of her brother's house, standing near the window, book in hand. The table was laid for tea—not very neatly, and without much regard to comfort. Madeline had prepared it, so far as it could be said to be prepared. It was not by any means as well as she could have done; like poor "Happy," she rarely did any thing as well as she could; and if she had been asked the reason, would have had no better reply than the evasive one, "What's the use?"

She was quite as much given to having a book in her hand as was Happy. And, while they were of a very different type, so far as regarded literary merit, it cannot be said that they were more helpful to this girl's nature than were Happy's to her. Nearly always they were written from the standpoint of dissatisfaction with what their authors were pleased to call "the dull com-

monplaces of life," and all references to Bible or church, or to the opinions commonly held by Christian people, contained a covert sneer. In short, they were books such as no living, active Christian could have enjoyed, or even tolerated. Stories they were, of course. Girls of Madeline Hurst's development rarely read much of other forms of literature, better written as regards style than the dime-novel series, but almost as unreal in their way as the most absurd of these, yet the unreality was too subtle for an unformed mind to notice.

So absorbed was the girl in the volume she held, that she did not hear the door open, and it was only when her sister-in-law was almost at her elbow that she gave a violent start and made an instinctive effort to hide the book; then, realizing the folly of such an attempt, turned, with it held open in her hand.

"Yes," said a high-keyed, peevish voice, "I would try to hide it; only I was rather too quick for you this time; you will not gain any thing by hiding them; I know that you spend every moment you can steal in poring over worthless trash. I told your brother so, only last night; the wonder is, that you are not more nearly ruined than you are. When are we to have tea, pray? Must we wait until that three-volumed story is finished?"

“You are at liberty to have it whenever you choose, I suppose,” answered the girl, in that sort of irritating calm which natures like hers can assume on occasion; “I was not aware that I had the management of that matter in my hands.”

“No, and I suppose you were not aware that you were to set the table, nor put the dining-room in order; in fact, if one may judge from your behavior, you are not aware that you have any duty in life but to read novels, and make yourself as disagreeable as possible. Why didn't you make some gems for tea?”

“I did not know that you wished any; it is the first I have heard of them.”

“The first you have heard! Would a girl who had common sense, and who was in the habit of doing any thinking for any one but herself, need to be told that when bread was scarce and baking-day twenty-four hours off, something else would be needed?”

“I am sure, Emily, I did not know that bread was scarce. Why can you not be reasonable about that? You must certainly remember that you ordered me to let the bread-jar alone, and said it was none of my business whether there was bread in it or not; after that, how could I be expected to know, without being told, that a substitute would be needed?”

“Yes, you harp on that! Because I told you one day that you needn’t meddle with the bread when Nancy was there to attend to it, and that she knew as well as you did when the jar needed scalding, your Indian nature took offense, and you made a resolve to be as hateful about that as you are about every thing else. I wouldn’t have such a disposition as you for any thing in this world! Treasure up a word that is said to you in haste, as though it was something dreadful; and make yourself and every one else uncomfortable. I suppose that is the way the heroine acted in the last novel you read; a sweet creature she must have been if you have been patterning after her all this week; for I must say you have surpassed yourself, even, in hatefulness.”

The sallow face of the girl grew crimson, and her eyes glowed until they resembled Mrs. Carpenter’s.

“You have no right to speak so to me,” she said, coldly; “but I suppose that will not make any difference. I am not reading a ‘three-volumed novel,’ and if I were, I cannot see whose business it would be except my own. What do you want for supper, Emily?”

“It is a pretty time of day to ask that! What we can get, of course. Baker’s bread, I suppose, which will have to be run after at the time when we should be eating it; your brother is very fond

of baker's bread, you know! he will have another proof of his sister's care for his comfort."

The girl faced around and looked her sister steadily in the face.

"Emily, what do you mean? What sense is there in this tirade? If you had wanted me to make something for supper, was there any thing to hinder your telling me so?"

"Oh, no, nothing in life; I might have had old Pete go through the town ringing his bell, and shouting out the valuable information that the Hursts were out of bread, in the hope that the news would fall upon your devoted ears and you would rush home from some of your haunts to attend to us! How long have you been in the house, pray?"

A conscious look came into the girl's face, as she said in a somewhat quieter tone:

"I have not been away from the house very long, and I should not have gone out had I known that any thing special was wanted of me."

"Of course not. How could such a stranger as you are in this house be expected to know that Nancy is always out on Friday afternoon, and that we commonly have supper on that day as well as on others? Why should you have any responsibility in the matter, any way? Eating is a vulgar occupation; I presume the fine ladies and gentlemen in your novels live without it."

Madeline turned away with an expressive sigh.

"You are in worse humor than usual," she said, coldly; "and that is certainly unnecessary. If there is any thing you want me to do, more than I have already done toward getting supper, I advise you to tell me what it shall be without more waste of time."

What would have been the outcome of this sisterly conference, but for the fact that Mrs. Hurst's attention was diverted, it might be difficult to surmise. Fortunately for Madeline, her sister-in-law had not heard the last response, being engaged in watching the slow, uncertain movements of a lady on the other side of the street, who was studying the houses opposite with utmost care, and was apparently in doubt which way to go. Mrs. Hurst, looking on, saw her presently quicken her pace and cross the street; a moment afterward the watcher uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I declare if she isn't coming here? What in the world can that be for? And I am not dressed! Mad, run to the door while I fix my hair a little; it is that new boarder at Mrs. Stetson's. I can't imagine what she wants. I have never called upon her; she looked too stuck up for me. But go along, do; she won't want to be kept waiting all night. Look in at the parlor as you pass, and see if it's in any kind of decent

order. If you would spend one third of the time you give to novels in keeping that room respectable, I needn't be in a panic every time the bell rings."

It was quite Mrs. Hurst's habit to plunge into new topics of interest without regard to any thing which she might have been saying before; so Madeline was not surprised, and, without a word in reply, moved toward the door, glancing in at the parlor as she went, and wondering scornfully what particular good her sister-in-law thought it would do to "look in upon" a disordered room on her way to receive a visitor! The room was not in order, and she knew it; the dust lay thick on some of the mantel ornaments, and the few books on the pretentious little center-table were in wild confusion. Madeline knew that she ought to take better care of the parlor, but her conscience had long since grown callous to that simple word "ought." She had few friends and almost no visitors; nevertheless, she was occasionally called upon to blush for the condition of the room. It was with a heightened glow, therefore, on her dark cheeks that she opened the door to Mrs. Holmes.

"Oh, it is you," that lady said, with a relieved air. "I am glad; I was not sure that the name on the door had any connection with your family. May I come in and speak with you a moment?"

and she entered the disorderly little parlor, seating herself with that courteous air of unconsciousness in regard to all disorder which the well-bred know how to assume.

"I am distressed about Mrs. Carpenter, as to how she is to be taken care of during the night. Surely she ought not to be left alone, or at the mercy of her drunken husband. I meant to ask her if she had any friends or acquaintances who would come, but unfortunately I offended her, and she would not permit any further effort upon my part."

"You offended her?" asked the girl, with a touch of surprise in her voice. Then immediately added: "Poor thing! Of course you did. An angel from heaven could offend her when she is in one of her moods. Indeed, madam, I do not know what can be done; she has no friends in town, and no acquaintances except the people for whom she works. That poor wretch of a husband would take care of her if he happened to be sober, and she would let him, but I am afraid she would drive him away."

"She has already done so," said Mrs. Holmes. "Is he ever unkind to her?"

Madeline laughed.

"Oh, no; he would not dare to be. Mrs. Carpenter is mistress of the situation always. It is a dreadful house, Mrs. Holmes. I was attracted to

them by the very peculiarity of their misery; so unlike drunkards' homes which one reads about."

"How well the girl talks, and what a brilliant color she has!" was Mrs. Holmes' mental comment; "she has the elements of a strong character, capable of accomplishing good or ill, according as she is swayed. I wonder how much that poor woman's story about her home is to be relied upon?"

Partly because of her desire to investigate this question, she made her next effort.

"Then you do not know of any person to whom we could appeal? Perhaps your sister would advise us."

Madeline shook her head with a quick flash of eyes which might mean several things.

"Oh, no! Mrs. Hurst does not know the woman, and she has nothing to do with such matters. I am sure I do not know what can be done. I would be very willing to spend the night with her, but I am afraid my brother"— She hesitated painfully, and Mrs. Holmes made haste to her rescue.

"I understand perfectly, my dear girl; you are much too young for night work of this sort; your brother would not permit it, of course."

How little she understood only Madeline knew. But she was grateful for the escape from explanation, and began again.

“There are one or two women, either of whom I think would go there out of kindness; but the trouble is Mrs. Carpenter would not have them; she is very peculiar. There is a woman living on the next street who takes care of the sick for pay, but I am afraid”—and again she stopped in embarrassment. Mrs. Holmes caught at the word “pay.”

“Oh, if there is some one who would be acceptable, I should be very glad; she should certainly be paid. Can we get word to her, and arrange it? I will pay whatever the woman is in the habit of receiving. I think she should stay for a few days and give Mrs. Carpenter a chance to rest. I do not know but it is rest that she needs more than any thing else. Is this woman one to whom we could make a little explanation—take into a sort of confidence? Because I am afraid Mrs. Carpenter is not just now in the mood to receive even ordinary kindness at my hands. Perhaps, Miss Hurst, you could join me in a little bit of diplomacy; let the poor woman think that the sin of engaging the nurse rests with you.”

Madeline shook her head with a pitiful smile on her face as she spoke:

“It would not work, dear madam; Mrs. Carpenter knows that I have not a cent of money to do any thing with, and never have. But we can manage it with the woman, if you will be so kind.

She has common sense and a good enough heart, only she is poor, and cannot afford to spend her strength without being paid for it."

"She shall be paid," said Mrs. Holmes again, much relieved. "That is the very simplest part of doing for others—the device of shirkers, I often think. There are people who have no trouble at all in getting out their pocket-books, but who shrink from personal work."

Madeline laughed.

"I do not know," she said; "I never had a chance to try any of their ways, but I know people who never think of putting their hands into their pockets for such things; it is strange that you should be willing to do so, when Mrs. Carpenter was rude to you."

"That does not change the obligation in the least, you know," Mrs. Holmes said, quietly, "nor was the poor woman entirely to blame. I think I was as injudicious as possible in saying what I did. I wonder if I can get you to manage the securing of the nurse for me? I would not ask it, but I have been long gone now from my sick husband, whose sole nurse I am day and night."

"I will attend to that," said Madeline, though as she spoke she wondered what Mrs. Holmes would think if she knew how hard it was for her to compass even so small a matter.

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Holmes, sweetly,

“though you have better thanks than human lips can speak. He recognized even ‘a cup of cold water,’ you know, if given in his name. I hope you work for his regard?”

Her voice was very sweet. Despite her efforts at self-control, it brought a rush of tears to the eyes of the lonely girl.

“I do not know,” she said; “or, that is, I do know only too well that I do not do any thing nowadays from a right motive. I used once to think that I belonged to Him, but I have given all that up long ago.”

“My dear girl, what a strange thing to give up! Do you not remember that there is nothing in life which lasts but that?”

“Well,” dashing the tears away, “I suppose I am wrong to say I gave it up. I mean, rather, that I never had it. I only thought I had. It was a miserable mistake, like all the rest of my life.”

“But mistakes of that kind can be remedied, my friend,” spoken with a bright, glad smile; “if I did not belong to the Lord yesterday, it is all the more reason why I should make haste to see to it to-day.”

She had risen, and was moving toward the door while she talked. In her heart was a burning desire to get back to her husband, whom she feared was at home and in need of her; but surely this was the King’s business.

Madeline shook her head and struggled to speak with dignity.

“Thank you, ma’am; you are good to think any thing about me, but you do not understand.”

“No,” gently; “that is true, but there is another truth that offsets it, my friend. The Lord Jesus Christ knows every turn of the way, and every brier and thorn which grows on it; take them to him, dear soul, and his word for it, all shall be well.”

She was on the steps by this time, but she held out her hand cordially.

“Will you not come and see me as soon as you can? I do not leave my husband very often, but I have long, lonely hours while he sleeps; I should be glad to have you come. May I expect you?”

“You are very kind,” murmured Madeline. It was all that at that moment she could trust her voice to say.

CHAPTER X.

ONE WALKS AMONG THORNS.

WELL," said Mrs. Hurst, confronting Madeline at the dining-room door, "why in the name of all that is extraordinary didn't you come and call me? Didn't you know enough to understand that that was your place?"

She had not only brushed her hair, but had exchanged her dress for a pretty evening one, and had evidently been waiting in a fever of expectancy for her summons. Madeline gave a start of dismay at the sight. She had forgotten her sister-in-law!

"She did not ask for you," she said, coldly; "her call was upon me."

"Oh, indeed! I was not aware that she had the honor of being acquainted with Your Highness. She is no lady, any how, with all her fine airs, or she would have known enough to ask for me. Pray what did she want of you?"

Madeline struggled with the desire to say,

“something which does not concern you,” and answered hesitatingly :

“She wanted to consult me about some one to stay with Mrs. Carpenter, the woman who did your curtains ; she is sick.”

“Consult with you !” There was surprise and intense scorn in the tone. “What in the name of wonder did she think you would know about such things ? or did she come to hire you to take care of the woman ? Is that the reputation you are acquiring among your chosen associates ?”

A wicked smile spread over the girl’s face as she said :

“No, she did not ask me to go ; she spoke of you.”

The moment the words were uttered she would have given much to have recalled them. It was not only that they conveyed a wrong impression, but they were so utterly out of accord with what had just been said to her ! Poor Madeline knew that her sister-in-law stirred up all the evil there was in her. She honestly believed that it would be impossible for her to live a Christian life so long as she stayed in her brother’s house.

“Little she knows about the thorns !” she told herself, bitterly, yet even then came the memory of the sweet reply she had received : “The Lord Jesus Christ knows every brier and thorn upon the road.”

Meantime, Mrs. Hurst was regarding her with angry eyes.

“Mad Hurst,” she said, “if you are not the most exasperating girl that ever lived in this world, then I hope I may be saved from seeing a worse one! What do you mean?”

“I simply mean that she asked me whether you knew of some one who could be secured to stay with Mrs. Carpenter; and as I knew you did not, I told her so.”

“And what business had you to do any such thing? What right have you to decide what I know, or do not know? That is all of a piece with your mean, selfish disposition; you were so afraid I would have a chance to speak to a lady once in awhile that you took pains to cheat me out of it, even though I was asked for, it seems; and then told a falsehood, and declared I was not asked for! If you think I am going to stand every thing from you, you are mistaken. If I don't tell your brother all about this, it will be because I can't!”

This threat neither dismayed nor angered Madeline. Frequent repetition had caused it to lose its sting. Complaint she well knew there would be, poured out in torrents; but she knew, also, that the utmost her brother would do would be to sigh and say:

“It seems a great pity to me that two women

who have nothing to do all day but stay at home and keep house, cannot live in peace.”

There was a certain degree of sympathy which Madeline had for her brother that often kept her from speaking the words she wanted to. He was an overworked, weary man; forever struggling with the problem of how to support his family in a style which his business did not warrant; for the truth may as well be told about this Hurst household. One demon which had as much to do with disturbing their peace as any other was named “Appearance.” To make as good a show as their neighbors, in dress and furniture, was Mrs. Hurst’s ambition in life. For this she stinted the kitchen and starved the appetites of her family. She kept a girl, not because her sister and herself would not have been equal to the entire work of her household, had it been well ordered, but because in the society in which she moved, and especially in the society in which she was forever struggling to move, “they” never did their own work. But she kept a miserable, slatternly, ill-taught girl, dull of comprehension, and with no desire to learn; one who managed, in one way or another, to break and waste material enough to support a small family; and who created an atmosphere of discomfort wherever she turned. No matter, she was a girl, and Mrs. Hurst, when she paid her round of visits among

her friends, could talk as glibly as the best of them about the "trials connected with servants."

Mr. Hurst, who, left to himself, or acted upon by other influences, would have cared little for such things, had allowed himself to be so warped by his wife's ideas, as to join with her in the weary strain to keep up appearances, until the tempers of both had been worn nearly threadbare. Given such a state of things, and you can readily understand what a storm of angry objections would greet Madeline's ears if she hinted at her wish to be independent and earn her own living. Not that they would have objected to her doing it in a genteel way, but the trouble was, that, in their judgment, no genteel way was open to her. She frankly assured them that she did not know enough to teach; that she had no talent for plain sewing, and that the one thing which she felt sure she could learn to do and be a success in, was light house-work!

It cannot be said that the girl herself was really anxious to take up any such work. Her training had been too false for that. She now held the belief that she would make a decided descent by doing so; but life in the only home she knew was so miserable that at times she almost believed herself ready for even that. At least, she had been ready to hold it over her indignant sister's head as the awful thing which she might be

driven to do. Of late, however, she had not cared to mention such a possibility, having discovered that her sister-in-law had fallen into the habit of entertaining a few of her most intimate friends, by whispering to them her awful fear that Madeline had inherited low tastes from some far-away ancestor, which, as she grew older, were cropping out in unexpected ways, her passion for sensation being even such that she actually hinted, at times, of her longing to indulge it by going out to service! "We really live in terror of being disgraced as a family by some wild escapade of this sort." This was the style of sentence with which the confidence was apt to close. Mrs. Hurst was not slow in discovering disagreeable things, and in making what she could out of them. Thus, when Madeline had by accident come in contact with Mrs. Carpenter, and been painfully drawn to the fierce and suffering woman, Mrs. Hurst sneered at what she was pleased to call the "intimacy" between them, and on occasion produced it as a proof that the girl had low tastes.

All things considered, it will readily be believed that the Hurst family did not sit down to a very comfortable table that evening. Mrs. Hurst was in her most disagreeable mood; even the presence of her three children did not succeed in quieting her tongue.

"Where is the rice which was left from dinner?" she asked, glancing with a glum face over the scantily-furnished table; "since we cannot have any thing else to eat, perhaps we may be allowed to have the remains of the dinner."

A swift look of dismay flashed over Madeline's face.

"There was very little left," she said, "after Nancy had finished her dinner."

"So much the worse for us, but what there is I suppose we can have, since we must do without bread."

"No," said Madeline, trying to speak quietly; "I did not suppose so small a dish of it would be needed, and I took it to Mrs. Carpenter, because she is ill, and I knew would have nothing suitable for a sick person to eat."

Mrs. Hurst looked savagely triumphant.

"Oh, you did! You see how it is, George. As long as we have to support Mad's particular friends, we must expect to have our grocery bills enormous, as you are always saying they are."

For some reason the unwomanly sarcasm hurt Madeline more than usual. It was of no use for her to struggle with the rising tide of mingled pain and indignation which threatened to choke her. As yet, she had not eaten a mouthful, and rising suddenly, she said:

"Since you are so troubled, I will save you the

expense of my supper for to-night, at least. That will perhaps atone for the saucerful of rice which I took to a sick woman."

In another moment the door closed after her with a bang, which but faintly expressed the tumult that was raging in her heart. Mr. Hurst looked annoyed.

"I don't see why you could not have let her eat her supper in peace," he said; "a spoonful of rice doesn't cost so much that there need be a fuss made about it."

"Oh, of course, you take her side," Mrs. Hurst said; "you always do; before the children, too, which makes it pleasanter for me! If you don't mind having the food given away, I'm sure I needn't; only I do hope you will not consider it necessary to grumble at me about expenses, when the grocery bill is due."

By this time poor Madeline was in her stuffy little back room up stairs, her head buried in her one small pillow, and she shedding some more of the bitter tears with which she almost nightly wet it. Contact with the sweet-voiced, gentle woman she had met that day seemed but to have added to her pain; life was becoming almost intolerable to her. She had gone over so often the possible avenues of escape from it, that they were all almost equally offensive to her. She knew only too well her sister-in-law's scheme for disposing of

her. Mrs. Hurst belonged to the class of women who believe that the one aim of a young woman's life should be to marry, as early and as satisfactorily as possible, provided one did not, by what she called being "too particular," lose valuable opportunities. Such an opportunity was, in her judgment, being held out now to Madeline.

"A better chance," she assured her husband, speaking vehemently, "than I ever expected Mad to have, I am sure! What the girl is thinking of, to hang back in the way she does, and run the chances of losing him, I can't imagine. I don't see why you don't speak to her, and help her come to her senses. She acts as though she could marry the President of the United States by saying the word."

"I don't want to order her to marry any body," the brother would say, walking restlessly up and down the room, "it looks too much like turning her out of the house; and I am sure that is the last thing I want to do."

"Oh, now, George," his wife would respond, with a contemptuous sniff, "don't go to getting sentimental; you don't know how to do it; and, if you did, it would be wasted on Mad; there is nothing in life that she longs for more than to be rid of us all."

"Why doesn't she take the man, then, and be done with it?" would the brother growl, being

sure that he was very much vexed with somebody, and not being quite certain whether it was sister or wife.

“That is just what I don’t understand; I thought she would jump at the chance. I’m sure I was never more astonished in my life than when I found out he actually meant business. I believe it is all because of her reading so many novels; she has too high-flown ideas for common people — wants somebody better than he.”

Consistency was not a marked trait in Mrs. Hurst’s character. It was not an unusual thing for her to advance, on the same evening, the theories that Madeline was entirely above her station in life, and looked higher than the remarkably nice young man who had honored her with his attentions; and that she had low tastes and interests, and would disgrace her family yet by some alliance utterly beneath her; if this were not the case, why did she run to that Carpenter woman’s, who lived in one room, in an alley, and supported her drunkard husband by taking in washing? Nice associates, those, for a Hurst! But it just showed the girl’s make-up.

* * * * *

From her interview with Madeline Hurst, Mrs. Holmes made all speed homeward, in great fear lest the doctor should have returned before this, and her husband be in need of her. As she

turned the corner and saw the doctor's carriage standing before the door, she almost broke into a run and dashed up the stairs, at last, in a way to make her nearly breathless. Dr. Portland regarded her with his gay, half-mocking smile. "Deborah returned from service, weary but triumphant!" he said, as he drew a chair for her, "or was it Dorcas? I'm a trifle mixed in biblical history, I fear. I have so little time to read up, especially on the days when I have to add the duties of nurse to those of my regular profession."

"Have you been long here? Have you needed me, Stuart? Have you had any refreshment?"

"Been here for ages," said the doctor, promptly, "and he fainted three times, when he found you had not yet returned. As for refreshment, he is probably quite beyond eating any thing by this time, after such long waiting."

"Doctor," said Mr. Holmes, smiling, "have you no respect for truth and veracity which needs guarding? Chrissy, my dear, I am entirely comfortable. Not nearly so tired as you look at this minute. We have not been long here, but long enough for the doctor to evlove a glass of fresh milk, and some very choice crackers from somewhere, on which I have feasted; and the ride has done wonders for me, I think."

"Outwitted!" said the doctor, throwing himself back in his chair, as one who had failed; "of

course she will believe him rather than me; it is to be expected."

Satisfied as to her husband's comfort, Mrs. Holmes' thoughts reverted at once to her recent experiences. And in answer to his question, she began to tell, at first only little bits, about Mrs. Carpenter; but, growing excited with her subject, was in its very depths before she realized it.

"I'll tell you what will have to be done," interrupted the doctor, suddenly; "you will have to reform that wretch of a husband. I don't know any thing which will bring Mrs. Carpenter to her senses like the shock of the discovery that her husband is really made of better stuff than herself! I believe it. But the difficulty is in convincing her, or, in fact, any other decent person, of it just now; but if you will engage to reform him, the thing will be done."

It was the merest babble of words with him, and the merry mockery in it jarred almost painfully on Mrs. Holmes' tired nerves; but her husband regarded the speaker very gravely and thoughtfully.

"There is truth in what you say, doctor. God pity the soul who, failing in love, cannot have even a show of respect for her husband. If only he could be made, before her eyes, into a God-fearing, God-serving man, it might be the means of saving her soul as well as his."

The doctor bestowed upon him a look of puzzled wonder, then burst into laughter. "I beg your pardon," he said, when he could control himself, "but I really believe you think the thing feasible. Imagine it, Mrs. Holmes! The fact is, he has not seen poor Joe, and we have him at a disadvantage. Only fancy Joe Carpenter made into a respectable member of society!" Whereupon he indulged in another outburst of laughter.

CHAPTER XI.

SHE IS PERPLEXED ON EVERY SIDE.

MR. HOLMES' face expressed only calm thoughtfulness.

"Have you never really seen any exhibition of power of that sort, Doctor?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Of what sort, my dear fanatic?"

"The sort which God uses when he transforms a soul. Is it possible that you have never known a character acted upon by a power manifestly outside of itself, to the degree that what it loved before, it learned to turn from with fear and hatred? In other words, do you not know what a Christian means when he speaks of the conversion of a soul?"

A sudden gravity, such as often overtook this man, shone for a moment in his eyes as he said:

"I know there are forces at work in the world which we common mortals do not understand; yes, I will be entirely frank; I have seen their

power." Then, turning to the lady, he resumed his gay tone: "Mrs. Holmes, my horses will be firm disbelievers in home missionary effort after to-day; I feel sure of it. Their supper-time must be long past. What is that about a 'merciful man being merciful to his beast'? I wonder what the effect is when the chief character is a woman?"

His eyes danced with merriment; it did not seem possible that they could have been almost dimmed with tears but a moment before over some tender memory. The lady marveled over it, while he said his parting words to her husband. Having departed by way of the western piazza, he looked in almost immediately to say:

"Mrs. Holmes, it will be quite worth your while to come out and get a view of this marvelous sunset; nothing in your frozen North was ever seen to approach to it in beauty. No, my friend," as Mr. Holmes made a movement to accept the invitation, "I did not say it would be worth your while. Your manifest duty is to take no more steps to-night, except those from that easy-chair to bed. No sunsets for you, if you please!"

Once outside, he ignored the sunset, although it was a marvel of crimson and gold, melting away into a tender glory formed of both, and began to speak rapidly.

"Mrs. Holmes, I am deeply interested in your home missionary efforts, or should they be called

foreign? Do you feel as though you were a pilgrim and a stranger, far from home? You may not think it, but I have a keen interest in even Mrs. Carpenter, to say nothing of old Joe. Will you not take me into a sort of partnership? There are more than these two to look after; I do not know their names, but I feel sure that you do; and you will find others—I see it in your eyes. What I am after, is to be counted in; consulting physician, you know, or friend; I like that word better. I shall require to know all the minute details of each individual case, the unpleasant features, as well as the pleasant ones, of course; and, between you and me, I am fully aware that the unpleasant ones will predominate. I am ready for them, but I want no rivals, if you please. You are to save all the particulars for me; if I am entered as an advisory member, I shall expect you not to forestall me by giving them first to somebody else.”

Mrs. Holmes regarded him curiously. It was not always easy to understand this man, who was sometimes grave when he meant the merest nonsense, and sometimes, under the guise of nonsense, gave her grave advice. The undertone of earnestness which she now detected in this whimsical speech roused her anxiety.

“What do you mean?” she asked, quickly.

“Nothing very alarming,” still speaking lightly;

“I was only offering to be sympathetic and helpful to the best of my humble ability.” Then, more gravely : “Mrs. Holmes, it is perfectly natural for you to return from your missions of mercy with your heart full of the sights and sounds which have confronted you ; it is also extremely probable that you will feel like talking them over ; what I am after just now, is to give you a word of caution. Your husband is keenly alive to any thing which interests you, to say nothing of his own unaccountable interest in other people’s sorrows and burdens, and he is not strong enough physically to bear the strain. He is doing wonderfully well, but his pulse goes to bounding like a caged animal over the stories which you tell him. Do not be alarmed, you have done no harm ; I am only guarding against the future. Save all the bright places for him—the whimsicalities, the grotesque features, of which there must be many ; people with over-tired nerves often need resting by some such means ; as for the heart-aches, if you will allow me to try to aid you in helping, where help can be offered, and in shouldering whatever end a clumsy fellow unaccustomed to the business can carry, I shall be honestly glad. I have a corner about me somewhere which responds faintly to the needs of humanity, upon occasion, and I would like to be useful.”

She thanked him with her lip quivering a little. She felt like a hopeless bungler. What, for instance, had she been able to accomplish that afternoon? In point of fact, she had been turned away from Mrs. Carpenter's door with orders never to come again; and now in her zeal she had actually injured her own especial charge!

However, she was comforted somewhat, upon her return to her husband, with the thought that neither she nor the doctor understood him perfectly.

"Chrissy," he said, his eyes bright with feeling, "God is very good. While I wait, resting, he lets my little wife go out and do her work and mine. Did you notice how much interested the doctor was in your description of that poor woman? It occurs to me that the road to his heart may be through the trials of others; and that his faith in God might be developed through becoming interested in humanity, enough to watch and discover what God is daily doing for it. He has been so good to us, dear, I wish we might repay him by turning his thoughts toward the source of all good."

"He is less troubled than the doctor supposes," thought the favored wife, "because he rests the world's burdens where he does his own, upon the mighty Arm, of which Dr. Portland knows nothing."

Nevertheless, she resolved to be more cautious in future. Her strange experience with Mrs. Carpenter had overbalanced her prudence for a time.

“You are not to think about any ‘poor woman’ save this one before you,” she said, gayly, “and she is going at once to make you a slice of perfect toast with a whole tablespoonful of cream on it. I have found a place where they will let me have a gill of cream a day. What do you think of that?”

Meantime, Happy had somewhat broken the level of her life with spasmodic efforts at doing her work as well as she could. It is true that as yet her efforts at reform had not been so marked as to surprise her employer. In fact, Happy had been almost gleeful over her assured reputation as a prophet when she said to Mrs. Holmes:

“I told you so! It didn’t do a mite of good, not a mite. She never so much as noticed the stairs that day, nor the table, nor nothing, and she scolded—why,” waxing eloquent in her earnestness, “I really b’lieve she scolded more that Saturday than she has all the other Saturdays put together this fall.”

Happy’s rhetoric was striking, but her meaning was plain.

“Never mind,” Mrs. Holmes had said, cheerily; “you had even a higher object than to please her,

you remember. And beside, she might have been pleased, although she said nothing about it; people do not always speak what they think about such matters."

"She speaks all she thinks when things ain't to suit her," said Happy with a sagacious nod of her head; "or, if she doesn't, she must have an awful lot of room for her thoughts. But I don't care; you noticed the stairs, Mis' Holmes, and that done me more good than though Mis' Stetson had sot down on each particular stair and praised it. I done it for you in the first place; I didn't care nothing at all about her."

What a very low plane it was on which poor Happy walked! The Christian woman could not help a faint effort toward lifting her higher:

"Oh, Happy! I like to have you want to please me, but have you forgotten what I told you about God, your Heavenly Father? Do you not have a little desire to do right in his sight?"

Actually Happy giggled, not in a bold way, but with a sort of shy bashfulness, as she said:

"Oh, Mis' Holmes, I don't know nothing about them things; I don't really."

"She can waive the entire subject as effectively as Dr. Portland can, if not as gracefully," her questioner thought, as with a sigh she turned away.

What to do for Happy was a question which

perplexed her perhaps as much as any of those which now haunted her leisure. There had been a little relief from the chief immediate anxiety by the departure of Mr. Arson on a business trip for his firm, but he would be back in a few days, and Mrs. Holmes felt that some decided step ought to be taken to save the girl from his attentions, but she had not the remotest idea how to take it.

She smiled sadly over the thought of how Stuart's keen brain would take hold of the problem, if only she dare consult him, and, remembering Dr. Portland's offer, smiled again, still sadly, as she felt how powerless he would be to advise in a matter like this. There was no one to advise, and there was every one to worry over. Among others, Liph. Since the night when she had spoken such plain words to him, she had only seen him across the street, and once, face to face for a moment on the piazza, when he attempted an awkward bow in recognition, his face redder than usual the while; but she heard much of him; rather, she heard his name often mentioned by his mother, and always in that loud, rasping tone of fault-finding. Such bitter words did this mother use to her one boy that those who overheard could almost find it in their hearts to excuse some of his evil ways. How could a boy help going wrong, when he was daily the subject of such a tongue? Yet Mrs. Holmes remembered

also those bitter tears. Surely his mother loved him. If only she could be made to understand how steadily she was driving him further down the road to ruin.

“If I dared tell her so,” thought Mrs. Holmes; “if I could only in some way get an influence over her, so that she would allow me to speak plainly.”

This “if,” like all others, she took to her one infallible Helper. The answer He sent her was so commonplace, and yet so entirely out of the line of her expectation, that for a little while she did not recognize it as from Him.

It was Saturday morning again, the day of days in Mrs. Stetson’s kitchen. It was constantly a puzzle to Mrs. Holmes how they evolved a breakfast out of the confusions which reigned there on all days, but on Saturday the plot thickened. She stood for a full minute with her hand on the knob of the door, unwilling to enter because of the loud voice which rasped the air:

“I wish you would get out of my way! I should think that at least you could keep your lubberly feet from staying around, where I have to stumble over ’em to do my work. Not a stick of wood have you brought me this blessed morning, and I’ve pumped every pail of water I’ve had to use. There’s a son for you! Oh, you’re a precious one; I’m proud of you! When it comes

to smoking and spitting and loafing, there ain't your equal in the whole country round; I'm sure of that."

There was a low-growled reply which the irresolute woman at the door could not catch, and then the mother's voice again:

"Shut up, do! I won't stand any more of your sass this morning, I declare I won't, not if I have to break a broomstick over your head! Get out of this room this minute, or I'll pour this kettle of water over you; I declare I will. Flesh and blood can't stand no more!"

This was growing too dreadful! The woman at the door resolved upon a retreat until quieter times. So did Liph. He came with a fierce stride, his hat drawn over his eyes, so that he did not see the startled form which he almost ran against; he was muttering fiercely, but his step was not unsteady. Poor Liph was at least "himself," and a miserable specimen of humanity was that self. "It is a worse face than Mr. Carpenter's, I think," was the verdict once more passed upon it.

Then, when she could summon courage, Mrs. Holmes made another effort for the cup of which she was in search.

The confusion was greater than ever before. The boarder had not believed such a thing possible, but it was. Dishes, lamps, kettles, pans, tubs

of dirty water, pails of garbage, empty tin cans, a basket of partially decayed vegetables, any thing and every thing which could add to the sights and smells, seemed to have chosen this moment to appear. Midway across the room Mrs. Holmes stopped in bewilderment.

“What do you want now?” This from her landlady, in the most ungracious of tones; there were times when Mrs. Stetson found it hard to be gracious, even to this most courteous of boarders.

“I am in search of a cup, Mrs. Stetson, one which will fit inside my alcohol-heater, but”—

“Well, you won’t find it,” interrupted Mrs. Stetson, “not a clean one; there ain’t a clean dish in this house. If we had five more sets of dishes, that good-for-nothing hussy would have them all out here in messy-rows. It does beat all what I have to stand! Happy, you everlasting idiot, why don’t you find a cup for Mis’ Holmes, and not stand there gauping?”

Thus directed, Happy sprang forward with evident desire to accomplish; but, alas for the attempt! A large hole in her apron, where a patch should have been, seized this opportunity to clutch at the handle of a saucepan, which stretched itself out from the back of the stove in search of mischief. Over went the saucepan, apparently rejoiced at the chance, scattering its greasy contents in all directions, among others,

over the front of the spotless white wrapper which Mrs. Holmes wore. On the top of the saucepan had been a platter, with the remains of fried ham and eggs, and a small plate containing scraps of various sorts. Of course, both platter and plate broke into a thousand pieces. Mrs. Stetson, with an exclamation which her boarder did not want to understand, made a dash for Happy's ears, and succeeded in boxing them soundly before she attempted to speak.

"I'm sure I'm sorry for your dress, Mis' Holmes, but ladies in fine dresses should not come down to the kitchen; it is no place for them; and that is all there is about it."

"Never mind the dress," said Mrs. Holmes; "it will wash." Happy, even in the midst of the angry tears which she was trying to mop away with her wet apron, could not help stopping to stare at the woman whose voice was low and quiet, and whose next words were: "I am sorry about the dishes, but isn't it fortunate that this pitcher did not break?" And she stooped to pick up a small, round-bodied glass pitcher, which the jar, or the quick steps, or something, had set in motion, and which had seized the opportunity to roll off the stove hearth and skip under the stove. "That is such a pretty pitcher, it would have been a real trial to have it broken. Have you a harder day's work than usual, Mrs. Stetson?"

“I should think I had!” said that woman, in awful grimness. “I declare I don’t know which way to turn. I was up half the night with the few stumps of teeth I’ve got left. If I could ever get time, and could scrape money enough together to pay the bill, I’d go and get rid of them, anyhow. Then this morning, of all days in the year, Sally must give out, and go to bed with a chill, and a pain, and I don’t know what not; and me having to fuss with her, and leave every thing in the kitchen to that good-for-nothing Happy. And if I’d sent her up stairs to read a story-book, I’d have been further along with the work this minute. It is enough to use up the patience of two Jobs, the life I have to live. How there is ever going to be a dinner got for eleven people is more than I can see.”

Mrs. Holmes understood her hostess quite well enough to know that when she appealed to “two Jobs,” the extreme limit of her endurance was indeed reached. It was certainly a situation calculated to call forth sympathy, to say nothing of one’s personal anxiety as regarded dinner. The boarder thought with satisfaction of the unfailing resource, beef tea and the “gill of cream”; and of the basket of very choice oranges which the doctor brought the day before. Stuart’s bill of fare was assured — what mattered the rest?

CHAPTER XII.

SHE "ENDEAVORS" IN A NEW LINE.

SHE had secured her cup, not without certain other minor perils of dress and temper, and was back in their room brewing her husband's after-breakfast cup of tea, before it even occurred to her that the unusual state of things in the kitchen might have a remote connection with her wish and prayer for Mrs. Stetson. With the thought came an exclamation of dismay, so outspoken that her husband looked up from the book he was reading to ask: "What is it, dear; any thing happened?"

"No," said Chrissy; "or, that is, a great many things have happened, I suppose," with a little laugh, "and this thing may, but I don't believe it; not yet."

"A riddle!" he said, smiling; "am I to guess the answer, or is it to be told to me?"

"The answer is not made, my dear, but your cup of tea is. Did you think I might have gone

to China in search of a new variety? I have been so long in getting it ready."

She stood leaning over his chair while he drank his tea, her face thoughtful, a trifle troubled.

"Are you making the answer?" he asked at last, as he returned the empty cup.

"No," slowly; "I am afraid the answer is made, and I do not quite like it. There are very disagreeable things that one might feel it one's duty to do, Stuart."

He laughed at that.

"Nothing is truer, my dear wife; I can speak feelingly; I have been placed in such situations myself."

"Have you?" she said, almost wistfully; "I cannot think it; you seemed always, to me, to be not only willing, but eager, to do the thing which ought to be done; but I am very different."

He reached his thin white hand out after her plump one, as he said:

"You do yourself injustice, my little Chrissy; I have never seen the shirking from duties which seems to haunt you. You must remember, my dear, that since I have had the right to look after you, I have always been obliged to hold you back, instead of urging forward; in other words, your temptation is to overdo, instead of underdo."

"Ah, but that is when work pleases me. Don't you know how I have wasted my time

since we left home? But never mind, you must not think or talk any more; it is time you were sleeping. Will you take a very long nap, and spare me all the morning?"

"I will do my best, dear. But you are not going out for a long walk this morning, are you? It must be quite warm in the sunshine; there is less breeze than usual."

She shook her head.

"I am not going to walk further than the kitchen this morning, Stuart. Some of the members of my Christian Endeavor Society need special help, and the place of meeting is the kitchen."

The look he gave her was so full of curiosity that she burst into merry laughter.

"You shall have a detailed account of the meeting some other time," she said; "just now you are to sleep."

He ventured but one question, having watched her with eyes that, had she taken time to look at them, might have told her several things, while she moved about, wheeling his couch into just the right spot, and setting the screen to her mind:

"Are you going to the kitchen in that dress?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" It was the delicate white he liked so well, fresh as the rose at her belt. Her first care on coming from her former trip to the kitchen had been to lay aside the one which

had been soiled there. "I shall attire myself in a manner suited to the needs of the kitchen. You ought to be able to look into it; or, no, on second thought, I don't believe you ought."

It was the plainest of prints in which she next appeared, made without a superfluous plait or gather — small-figured, dark-colored, but fitting perfectly, and the plainness relieved only by an edge of white at the throat. Happy looked up on her entrance, astonished, but respectful. Plain and dark as the dress was, it had an unmistakable air which the girl recognized. No dress of hers ever looked like that. Happy did not know why.

Mrs. Holmes moved skillfully through the multiplied bewilderments of the kitchen to her landlady's side.

"Mrs. Stetson, may I come and help you with the dinner? I know how to do some things, and you can tell me about others if you will."

Mrs. Stetson let the spoon sink softly and swiftly out of sight into the mixture she was stirring, while she surveyed her visitor from head to foot, amazement plainly written on every feature.

"You don't mean it!" she gasped, rather than said, at last.

"Certainly I do. If Sally is sick, somebody ought to do at least some of the things which usually fall to her. I shall be very glad to help if

you will let me. Where shall I commence? May I wash the dishes?"

"For the land of pity!" said Mrs. Stetson; "no, you mayn't. Think of washing dishes in that dress; you look as though you were going to meeting this minute."

Mrs. Holmes laughed pleasantly.

"It is a ten-cent calico, dear madam, bought and made with special reference to work in the kitchen. This dark blue cloth is what is known as 'oil-boiled' goods, and will take almost innumerable washings and come out fresh and bright. Mrs. Stetson, I am sure that Happy and I can reduce these dishes to order in a very short space of time."

Without more ado she set to work; it was quite evident that if she was to be of any help to the dazed woman, she must take the initiative. As for Happy, she was quite as bewildered as her mistress, and looked on in a condition of giggly embarrassment while Mrs. Holmes, with skillful fingers, marshaled the sticky multitude into orderly ranks; good-naturedly refusing to receive forks with spoons, or cups with glasses, when Happy, in a spasm of helpfulness, plunged some of these miscellaneous articles into her pan.

"Oh, no, Happy, let us wash and rinse and dry the glasses first, then the silver; after that the cups and saucers may have their turn; one can

work a great deal faster in that way, besides having the dishes nicer. Did you know it?"

No, Happy did not know that, nor any of the five hundred little things which go to make the difference between skilled labor and slovenly, half-done service. Mrs. Holmes, as she plunged the astonished glasses into their bath of hot water, moralized over the folly of it all. Why should Happy, for instance, be expected to know the scientific ways of doing these things? Who would think for a moment of engaging her to teach their children arithmetic or music, without first discovering what degree of training she had had to make her fit for the work? Yet kitchen girls were supposed to understand their business without having ever so much as had the opportunity to learn! Was it so strange that the majority of them stumbled into the wrong way, and lived on, a trial to their mistresses and a misery to themselves?

"If I were a philanthropist and had fifty thousand dollars to give to some important cause I would go through the country establishing cooking and housekeeping schools."

Chrissy Hollister in her mother's dining-room had often made some such remark as this; behold her now in Mrs. Stetson's kitchen establishing her first one!

"Without the 'fifty thousand,' too," she said to

herself, with an amused little smile, while she worked.

She was no novice playing at reform. Her mother had been a pattern housekeeper in her own way; and her daughter Chrissy, when she awakened to the fact which always astonishes a sweet-hearted earnest-souled young woman, that she was actually to have a home of her own to order, set about learning the best ways of ordering it, bringing to the work the same untiring zeal and energy which had made her a power in whatever direction she turned her thoughts.

It is true that she had been especially favored; for, in addition to her mother's practical knowledge of all domestic matters, during the last six months of Chrissy Hollister's girlhood there had been set up in the city where she lived, one of those institutions which have recently arisen to bless humanity, a thoroughly well-regulated cooking-school, where a certain number of young women could, for value received in dollars and cents, go through a systematic course of instruction in regard to all the bewildering routine belonging to the kitchen. It was perhaps, then, no wonder that in the pretty home which awaited her in the great city where her husband lived, she speedily became a mystery and an object of envy to her young married friends because of the skill and ease with which she attacked problems

which were infinitely worse to them than any in Euclid.

“I do it,” she had said once, in answer to a despairing question from a housekeeper of three months’ standing, “just as you play at sight one of Beethoven’s masterpieces, because I have been taught how. It is a science, my friend, as assuredly as music; the only trouble is, it is a wofully neglected one.” So now she said, in answer to Happy’s admiring “Law, Mis’ Holmes, how do you do it so quick and so nice”: “Because I have learned, Happy. In my own house I made a regular study of washing the breakfast dishes. For the first six weeks of my housekeeping I could get no help; and I used to plan ways of arranging the dishes so that they would come in regular order, the more delicate and least soiled ones first; and I planned where to set them so as to make the fewest moves possible. I changed my arrangements every morning for a week, until I had the matter reduced to perfection.”

Happy chuckled: “It seems awful funny,” she said; “I sh’d as soon think of one of the roses off the big bush in the corner out there comin’ in and washin’ the dishes, and knowin’ how; and it seems awful funny to think of your thinkin’ about it, and planning ways to do it. Why, I don’t do that myself; I don’t think about them a mite more than I can help; I keep goin’ on with the

last story I read, all the while I am doing the dishes ; I try to plan what he'll say next, and what she'll do, and all of 'em ; and sometimes I get that busy over 'em that I forgit what I'm about."

Mrs. Holmes could readily believe it ; also, she could have wept over the poverty of poor Happy's life, and her pitiful attempts at making pleasure. "It will not do to let one's mind go much away from one's work," she said, gently, "until the work, in all its details, has been thoroughly mastered, and there is no new thing to learn about it ; then, indeed, some work becomes a sort of habit, and one's fingers can be trusted to carry it out to perfection, while one's thoughts are busy elsewhere. I studied French in that way, last winter."

"You did!" said Happy, in unutterable awe and admiration, holding her drying-cloth poised in the air while she stared and admired.

"Yes. I would not keep those dishes waiting for a moment, Happy ; the rinsing-water is too hot for that ; take them out one by one and let them drain ; no, do not attempt to dry them now ; see how wet you will get your cloth almost immediately ; by the time we have the salver full, those first ones will be almost dry ; they will need but a touch to finish them. Mr. Holmes was teaching me French ; and I lived a very busy life, with not much time for study ; so I planned that when

I was making my bed and setting my room in order, I would learn a French verb. I fastened the book open on the mantel, and looked at it when I passed that way, and managed very nicely both work and study; but that was after I had mastered all the details of the room, and knew exactly what needed doing and how to do it. I remember, one week, I wished to change the arrangement of the spread and the pillows on my bed, and I was obliged to close the French grammar for two mornings and give attention to the new way; otherwise I would become so absorbed in the study as to forget it."

"You are an awful funny woman!" said Happy, with perfect frankness; "I never see any one the least mite like you before."

During that busy morning, Mrs. Stetson, to judge from the expression of her face, must have felt the same. Mrs. Holmes worked steadily, skillfully, and with a swiftness unknown to that region, going from one task to another with the air of one who had done such work before, and knew instinctively what would be needed next.

"I declare for it," said her landlady, at last, her admiration breaking all bounds, "I most wish you was a poor widow, with nothin' to do but house-work, to earn your living, and I'd hire you quicker than a cat can wink, and pay you the biggest

wages ever was paid in this kitchen; see if I wouldn't!"

Mrs. Holmes could hardly repress visible manifestation of the cold shiver which ran through her frame over that terrible word "widow." She had come too near the shadow of it, not to feel a dart from its quiver of pain.

"What is the next thing?" she asked, making quick effort to turn Mrs. Stetson's thoughts from herself. "I notice that your bread dough is light. May I mold it into loaves, or do you prefer to do that yourself?"

"Oh, land!" said Mrs. Stetson, "you don't say you know how to make bread! Well, I don't, and that's the truth. I've been feeling my way along with it, and wondering how it was going to come out, and it has hung like a great stone around my neck, all this morning. You see, Sally, she understands it, and always tends to it, and I never sensed the idea that she might get sick. I've always been in luck having girls who knew how to make bread; I've never done it more than half a dozen times myself, and made a failure of it then, pretty much; and since you are so powerful good and kind, and I'm sure I'll never forget it of you if I live to be as old as Methuselah—which I hope to the land I won't—if you will knead it up and get it into loaves, I'll be gladder of that than of all the rest put together."

The younger woman looked with wondering pity upon this housekeeper of a quarter of a century who yet had not learned how to make the one important article of daily food! Then, without more delay, she proceeded to the task of "kneading up" the bread. How glad was she that her own careful hands had washed those bread-tins but a half hour before!

CHAPTER XIII.

SHE CALLS LEMON PIE TO HER AID.

THE last smooth loaf was receiving its final patting, preparatory to being tucked under covers, while Mrs. Stetson stood at a little distance, soliloquizing; arms akimbo, tired, wrinkled face, with a dab of flour on one cheek and a streak of soot on the other. Such was the picture which she presented to the trim young woman who patted the bread, and looked out at her from the half-open door.

“What in the name of wonder will I get for dessert?” Mrs. Stetson pronounced the word as though she were speaking of the plains of Sahara. “I wish to the land folks didn’t have to have desert every blessed day of their lives! It hasn’t got any reason nor sense in it, to my way of thinking. Eat a good big dinner of roast beef, and two kinds of potatoes, and beans, or something, and pickles and bread and jelly, and every thing they can get, and then begin all over again, with fresh

plates and all, and swallow down something sweet and sticky—I'd like to know who first got up such a ridiculous fashion, any way! But there is no use in talking; folks do it, and so I s'pose folks will keep on doing it to the end of time. But I don't know more than the babes in the woods what to have, nor how to make it."

Mrs. Holmes, hearing this forlorn confession, stepped forward for a better view of the speaker, the better to entertain Stuart with the entire scene. It was impossible not to be amused, but, as she caught a glimpse of the worried face which had grown prematurely old, it was also impossible not to be sorry for her. Mrs. Holmes considered. She had been long gone from her husband, only taking occasional trips to see that he was comfortable. She had been very busy and was growing weary, despite the fact that youth and a perfectly healthful body were her strongholds. Should she?

A long-drawn, almost hopeless sigh closed the soliloquy in the other room, and decided the listener. That sigh covered other worries than what should be had for dessert, and she who knew what some of them were, and felt powerless to help, was yet determined to lift where she could. She took thoughtful care for the loaves which had now become her pride, and for which she had conceived that mingled affection and solicitude which

every good bread-maker understands; then turned to the mistress, whose face was still puckered over her problem.

“Mrs. Stetson, I have been looking at some beautiful lemons while I was at work. Do your boarders all like lemon pie, and do you care to have me make some for dessert?”

The instant lifting of the shadows on the worn face would have been answer enough, but Mrs. Stetson broke into another torrent of words.

“I declare for it if you was an angel come down from heaven, you couldn’t do any more than you have this morning, nor half so much! I don’t suppose the angels know how to wash dishes, and make bread and pies; at least, I hope to the land that they don’t have to do it where they live. Like lemon pie? I should say they did. Every last one of them looks as though he had had a fortune left him when he sees a piece coming. And as for Liph—well, I never in all my days seen any one so crazy after any thing as he is after lemon pie. I’d have it oftener than I do, jest for him, if they didn’t all like it so everlasting well, and want two pieces around, some of ’em, and boarding-houses can’t stand that, Mis’ Holmes; not at my prices. But lemons is getting plenty now, and cheap; and there’s eggs and things plenty, too; I never thought of lemon pie. But I’ll make it, Mis’ Holmes, and thank you for

putting me in mind. I can't make as good a crust as Sally, and that's a fact; but I ain't afraid but I can make one that they'll eat."

Mrs. Holmes had her own opinion of Sally's pie crust, and if her landlady's was not so good, why, then—. She made haste to speak. "I would just as soon make it for you, if you choose. I used to make lemon pies for my mother. It will seem quite like home to make them again. I will just run up stairs and see if my husband needs any thing, then I will attend to the pies. You are tired, and have quite enough to do besides."

There was a smile on her face, and her step was light as she went away; she did not feel so tired as she had but a moment before. One sentence in Mrs. Stetson's flow of words gave her hope and courage: "I'd have it oftener than I do, jest for Liph." There spoke the mother-heart. It was another proof that Mrs. Stetson had by no means lost her love for her all but ruined boy; it afforded also a hope that, through the medium of lemon pie, a hint might in some way be conveyed to the mother of a better way than the one she was taking.

"I am conducting my Christian Endeavor meeting," was Mrs. Holmes' statement to her husband as she held his glass of milk, while he settled himself on the piazza.

"The subjects before us are dish-washing, bread-making and lemon pies."

"Capital subjects," he said, returning her merry smile; "there certainly has to be a great deal of 'endeavoring' over the first two; I don't know about the 'Christian' part of it."

"I do. There is a great deal of the 'Christian' part needed for those occupations; more than you gentlemen, who never have to endure the trials connected with them, know any thing about."

"You are mistaken in your premises; I know a great deal about both. When I was in college I boarded myself, and washed the dishes regularly and thoroughly every Saturday. There were seven of them. I could never understand how there came to be so many, when I used the same plate for each meal, and drank neither tea nor coffee; but there certainly were. I remember particularly a certain bowl, I think it was, which was always greasy. I am sure I do not know why; there were very few things on my bill of fare which contained any grease. Oh, I know all about housekeeping, and I assure you I think it requires a great deal of grace to get through with it; mine did. I do not know about bread," he added meditatively; "I never really tried to make any, but I have watched others, and it looked rather easy to me; however, I tried griddle cakes once, and they were a total failure."

“Oh, Stuart,” said his wife, dropping into a low seat before him, in a bubble of laughter, “did you really live in such dreadful fashion when you were in college? You never told me about it.”

“Not at all,” he said, composedly sipping his milk. “I lived elegantly; fared sumptuously every day. I used to have my plate fresh for breakfast, and turn it over and use the other side at dinner-time.”

“Oh, horrible! But how did you get it clean? I thought you washed dishes only once a week.”

“That was all,” he said firmly; “I set my foot like a flint against doing it oftener. Welland wanted to do it on class days, but I never yielded an inch to him. He was my chum, and boarded with me for awhile. He is a lawyer now; lives in Chicago, and has several courses with his dinners. Why, about the plate, that was easily managed. I rubbed it off very carefully after dinner with a bit of clean paper, and it was all ready for the next morning’s meal. We eschewed suppers as being injurious to our digestive organs. What are you doing down stairs, Chrissy, and what is the end in view?”

“The immediate end is lemon pies, as I told you,” said his wife, rising, “and they will be warm and horrid if I do not have them in the oven very soon. As to the end in the distance, it is a Christian Endeavor meeting, I tell you. What

will result remains for the future to tell; but I expect results."

"I do not doubt it; you could not give a fellow a piece of one of them, I suppose, in the shape of lemon pie?"

"No, indeed!" she called back to him from the hall, "it would be 'injurious to your digestive organs'."

"Your son likes plenty of sugar in them, I suppose?" she said to Mrs. Stetson, a few minutes later, stirring the sticky mixture while that woman looked on admiringly; "young men are nearly always fond of sweet things. It is so nice in you to think of him in your cooking. You will have to tell him how you planned these pies expressly for him."

"Me tell him!" said the gray-haired mother, pressing her thin lips together fiercely; "not much will I! I slave for him night and day, and I cook things a-purpose for him often enough; it is a kind of a second nature, I guess; but I ain't such a fool as to tell him so. When he's going to destruction right before my eyes, I ain't going to pet him, and make him believe I'm tickled to death about it. I tell him right out plain a dozen times a day exactly what I think of him; and there ain't no petting in it; he can't accuse me of not speaking the truth to him, and doing my best to keep him from ruin."

Was this the "chance" for which this young fisher of souls had spent her morning in the warm and crowded kitchen? She tried to feel her way cautiously.

"Oh, dear madam, I am sure you are wrong about one thing. No boy was ever yet injured by his mother's tenderness. Plain speaking they need, all of them, I suppose; but 'speaking the truth in love,' that is what people gone astray need more than any thing else in life, I believe."

She winced inwardly as she said the words, remembering how very little love had been mingled with her plain, strong words to Liph on the one occasion of her talking with him.

"Humph!" said Mrs. Stetson, with a hard sneer. "S'pose he was your boy and treated you as he does me, do you believe you'd molly-coddle him?"

"I do not know," said Mrs. Holmes, firmly, "because I do not know whether, under trying circumstances, I should do right or wrong; but I know perfectly well what it would be right to do. To hate the sin and to use all our powers of gentleness and patience with the sinner, is what God does, dear madam, and He is our example. I am so sure it would do your boy good to have some of the gentleness, that I mean to tell him, the very first opportunity I get, that his mother had lemon pies for to-day's dinner because he

was fond of them and she wanted to please him.”

They had the kitchen to themselves, Happy having gone to set the table. Mrs. Stetson was beating eggs while she talked, or rather while she stood silent beside the younger woman; presently she seized the corner of her long-suffering apron and wiped away a straggling tear, as she said in a half-choked voice :

“You think I’m hard on him, then?”

Can people pray and speak to a mortal at the same moment? Chrissy Holmes feels sure that they can.

“Poor mother,” she said, and her voice was like music in its gentleness, “forgive me, but I think you are. Not in your heart, but in your words. He needs to see represented in you the forgiving love of God, the Savior of sinners. A mother’s love and tenderness are perhaps the most vivid pictures of God in Christ that men, especially, can ever know. I am sure your boy has his seasons of hating himself, and of longing to be other than he is. If at such moments he could recall his mother’s look of infinite yearning, patience and desire, what might it not do for him?”

Was she talking beyond the reach of this uncultured woman? or was there a culture of the heart which love would translate? If she had not utterly mistaken, there were strong depths to this

rugged nature. There was silence for so long, that Mrs. Holmes, praying still, ventured to glance again into the worn, seamed face; it was working painfully.

“I am as sure as I stand here that I could die for the boy,” she said at last, struggling to speak quietly; “but it has appeared to me that I ought to keep it before him what an awful disappointment and disgrace and shame he is to me; and how I have slaved, and all for nothing!”

Her voice kept rising with her words, until the sound of tears went out of it and there was only fierceness left.

“Do you think he does not know that?” said the younger woman, keeping her voice low and tender and solemn. “It is the thing which at times drives him to utter self-loathing and despair, and sends him deeper into the mire. I am certain, dear madam, that he needs to hear his mother’s voice low and tremulous, as it used to sound when he was young and innocent, and meant to be your strong tower of support. You know he had such plans once, don’t you? He needs to have their memory revived by the look on your face, and the love in your voice.”

The eggs were abandoned; Mrs. Stetson was sobbing now; whether the lemon pie had a lovely foam over it or not, the tears must have their way. The younger worker gently possessed herself of

the dish and went on with the manipulations, while the other sobbed out :

“It’s of no use to talk ; I can’t do it. I’m that wrought upon and mad and discouraged when I think of what he was and meant to be, and what he is, that I can’t, to save my life, help flying out at him and giving him all the tongue I’ve got ; and he deserves it, too !”

“Mrs. Stetson, there is a way to help it. There is only one way, I believe, for sorrow such as yours ; all minor helps sink into insignificance. What Liph needs more than any thing else is his mother’s prayers. You said you would die for him, and I believe you. What you are called upon to do, instead, is to live for him, and to pray for him. Give yourself utterly to God, dear friend, and cry to Him for the salvation of his soul. He will help you ; I am sure of it. I know Him well ; he never failed a soul who asked ; he never will. He can speak to Liph in a voice so full of power that the boy must hear and think and decide. If you will pray for your son with the strong crying of those who mean it, and then represent God in his mercy and patience to him, I I feel in my soul that I have the right to tell you God will get hold of him and save him. Will you do it ?”

Mrs. Stetson had retired to the window, had buried her gray head in the apron, regardless of

dabs of egg and flour and butter with which it was besprinkled, and was vainly trying to regain self-control. A moment of prayerful silence, then the young worker spoke again :

“Dear madam, I know you will forgive the plain words I have said, because from my soul I long for your son’s salvation, and mean to pray and work for it; and I believe you will try to save him in the way I am proposing. I feel so sure of it that I am going to ask you something further. We are now almost ready for dinner; every thing is in shape and progressing nicely, and I can manage the whole to your entire satisfaction, I am sure. If now you are willing to trust me, to promise to join me in this matter, and go to God on your knees for your boy, and never give him up again while God gives you breath to pray, then please go away to your room, and think it over, and pray it over. If you will go up stairs now, I will take it as your answer to my plea.”

Would she? Mrs. Holmes felt her nerves quivering almost as one in a chill, so great was her desire and her fear. Like a statue stood the woman at the window, while one, two, three minutes passed; then turning suddenly, without dropping her apron from her eyes, she strode across the room and vanished up the back stairs. Mrs. Holmes drew a long, quivering breath and felt as though she must fly up the other stairs into her

husband's arms, and cry. But of course that could not be done, on Stuart's account. Besides, there were pies to bake and potatoes and turnips to mash, as well as numberless other things to be done!

CHAPTER XIV.

SHE AMAZES ONE OF THEM.

LOOK here, Mis' Holmes, what are you doing it for?"

It was Happy's voice, bewildered, almost awe-stricken. In her hands she brandished a knife, a spoon and three forks, which had just been banished by Mrs. Holmes from the neatly laid table, because they were not bright enough to warrant their moving in such society. Happy had for the third time, under Mrs. Holmes' instruction, taken off some of the dishes in order to straighten the cloth; but so very gentle, even genial, had been the voice and manner of her new mentor that Happy had not even once frowned nor twitched her shoulders; on the contrary, she had developed a continuous tendency to laugh.

"You see, Happy," said her teacher, as for the third time the cloth was re-arranged, "it will never do to have this table-cloth awry; it is a

very fine one, and is ironed beautifully; but to lay it crooked would spoil the effect, and give us an impression of disorder and discomfort."

Happy surveyed the table-cloth with curiosity; it was one of the marvels of this eventful Saturday morning. But a few moments before Mrs. Stetson left the kitchen she had made a dash into the dining-room, surveyed with disdain Happy's leisurely efforts at setting the table, given a short, sharp order to the effect that the few dishes already in place be removed at once, snatched at the soiled and much-worn cloth, cast it in a flimsy heap in the corner of the room, and then produced from her store this marvel of whiteness and fineness. In vain Happy ventured to suggest that it wasn't the day for clean things.

"Yes, it is, too," said the landlady, sharply; "it's the day for clean things of all sorts! I guess I can have a clean table-cloth Saturday, if I want it. Go and put that rag in the dirty clothes and set this table nice, or I'll be after you."

To Happy's comfort and the table's benefit, it was Mrs. Holmes, instead, who had been "after" the disorderly girl, and, by dint of patient direction and patient determination that the thing should be done right, had at last succeeded in having the table-cloth properly straightened, and laid without a wrinkle. But Happy's wonder,

which had been rising all the morning, now reached its climax, and she arrested proceedings by that short, pertinent question :

“Look here, Mis’ Holmes, what are you doing it for?”

“Doing what, Happy? Set the dishes in place as rapidly as possible, please, as we have very little more time.”

“Doing the hull of it, Mis’ Holmes; the bread, and dish-washing, and every thing. Nobody ever did so before, not in this kitchen, and it ain’t because you’re a friend to her. She sassed you only this morning right to your face, and she says you are stuck up, and she can’t cook fine enough to suit you, and you fuss over things. Now, what’s it for?”

It seemed desirable to respond to the look on the bewildered girl’s face, if not to the words in which she voiced her perplexities. Evidently the simple bit of Christianity involved in reaching out a helping hand had thrown Happy’s brain into a whirl. She was utterly at a loss to discover a motive for such action.

“Lay the mats in this way, Happy, and the glasses want to be set so. Don’t you think they look better than they do standing as though they were thrown on the table? Why have I been helping Mrs. Stetson and you a little while this morning, do you mean? Do you remember what

I said to you a few days ago about the Lord Jesus Christ? I am doing it for him.”

“My land!” said Happy, “I don’t know what you mean no more than if you talked Dutch. What could He care about washing dishes, and all Mis’ Stetson’s other work?”

“But he does care! Don’t you know I told you? He cares for her; knows just how troubled she is to-day, and how many hard things she has to bear. He wants her helped and comforted, and he sent me to do what I could.”

“It beats all!” burst forth Happy again, after a moment’s puzzled staring. “I never heard any body that was stark crazy talk as queer as you do. Any body would think that that One you talk about was up stairs in your room this minute, and had sent you down here to work.”

“Which is the simple truth, my girl” — albeit the lady smiled while she spoke; Happy’s way of putting the truth was rather unique — “He is up stairs in my room, and down here with us, and in the kitchen, and everywhere. Do you not remember that He sees all persons and things, and is interested in our smallest acts? Why, Happy, when He was on earth He went about all the time doing kindnesses for any who needed, and would let Him help. Have you not read His life? You like to read stories; some of the strangest stories ever written you will find in that book.”

"The Bible is an awful big book," said Happy, discontentedly, "and I don't know much about it; but I don't understand it a mite more than I did. He wouldn't wash dishes and make pies."

"He would do whatever the soul He was helping, needed most, Happy. At one time He washed the feet of twelve tired, dusty men, to teach them not to shrink from the humblest duties; and He said that His life here was to be an example to His followers. I am one of his followers; that is why I try to help."

"I'd be willing to help people that I liked," declared Happy, in growing discontent. "I'd wash dishes, or scrub, or do any thing for you, Mis' Holmes, but she's so dreadful cross and snappy, and ready to bite you if you do the least thing. How would you like to have your ears boxed, and you a great big, grown-up girl? I guess you wouldn't have washed her dishes if she'd 'a' done that to you."

Happy, scowling, was a curiosity. She had evidently felt her disgrace of the morning keenly. Poor Mrs. Stetson would be likely to have even a harder time with her hereafter, unless some influence outside of herself could reach and reconstruct this girl. They were both in the kitchen now, and the self-appointed cook was giving careful attention to the dozen or so "last things" which go to make or mar a dinner. It seemed a

most unpropitious time for a lesson in theology. There were even those who would have deemed it shading on the irreverent to attempt to talk of religious matters under such circumstances. But Chrissy Holmes' religion pervaded every thought and act of her life, and assuredly had to do with the kitchen fully as much as with the parlor.

"I have sometimes been able to conduct myself in a Christian manner in a well-ordered parlor, without having a realizing sense of the presence and help of Jesus Christ," she said once to a lady who was exclaiming over the impropriety of "bringing religion down to the level of the commonplace," "but when my duty lies in the kitchen, especially at the nerve-distracting hour of 'dishing up,' I have discovered that I need a special measure of the grace of God to keep my voice gentle and my face unruffled."

There were people in her own station in life who thought Mrs. Holmes "just a little queer, you know"; perhaps it was not strange that she so impressed poor Happy. She knew exactly how much milk she was adding to the gravy; nevertheless, she was considering at the moment how to make a solemn, far-reaching truth plain to the girl who held the platter.

"Happy," she said, "I have been thinking about your being willing to help people whom you liked; that is a very natural state of mind,

and there is a sense in which we must always have more pleasure in serving those whom we love than any others. God meant that it should be so, in order that many duties might also be pleasures; but that other One of whom we were speaking—your example and mine, you know—served steadily and patiently those who scolded and threatened and mocked; yes, even those who struck at Him not only, but actually spit in His face!”

“Oh, my land!” said Happy, in solemn horror and disgust; “that ain’t true, Mis’ Holmes; now, is it? Because there ain’t a man living but would knock folks down for such things, if he could!”

“This One could, you know; He had all power. He could have killed with a word, with a look, the men who mocked and the men who struck and spit. What He did was to say: ‘Father, forgive them’.”

Either Happy had never heard this awful fact in history before, or else—and more probably, she had heard it as hundreds of others have, without giving it a moment’s consideration—heard it as something which had not in the remotest degree to do with her, and happened so long ago, if at all, that it was not worth while to regard it. She was entirely silent, but the look on her face interested and half-bewildered her teacher. Was it a scowl, and, if so, for whom or what?

“Mis’ Holmes,” she said at last, exploding the words as though they must be spoken, “if they’d have done it to me, I’d have spit back and hated them, and I couldn’t help it either.”

“But, Happy, what if you had been there by the side of this One who was hanging on a cross, dying for you, and they had done it to him, not to you?”

“Then I would have dug my nails into them and scratched their eyes out!”

It would not do to think of Happy as a mere good-natured simpleton, after this; her eyes flashed as Madeline Hurst’s might have done, and there was a whole avalanche of pent-up hatred in her tones.

“Yes,” said the teacher, gently; “but, Happy, suppose you had loved that One hanging there so much more than any body else in the world, that to please Him was what you lived for; and suppose that you were quite sure that to please Him you must forgive even such people, and help them if you could?”

“Oh, Mis’ Holmes! Then I’d ’a’ tried; I would really. Because I would do a’most any thing for any body that loved me; I would, honest; because I ain’t never had much loving done, you know, and I know what it is to get along without it.”

Poor hungry soul! Could a Christian woman

help calling out to the infinite Lover of souls to come into this starved heart and transform it? Happy loved by Jesus Christ! It was a wonderful thought, truly; yet the Christian woman who knew Him well, could not for a moment doubt the fact.

“Poor child!” she said; “I wonder at you for being willing to get along without it. The world is a very hard place for those who undertake that. But we are ready to serve the dinner now, and I expect you to do it very nicely; because it is my dinner, you see, and you said you liked to please me. Let me see how swift and skillful and quiet you can be. Remember, I shall be watching you.”

It was certainly a success. What the boarders thought, who sat down to spotless whiteness, and handled dishes as smooth as velvet, and found the mashed potato delicate and creamy and hot, and asked for a second supply of turnip which had no lumps and was seasoned just to the taste, I do not know. The probability is, that, being most of them men, they thought nothing about it in detail; they simply had a sense of being comfortable, more comfortable than usual, and wondered why a dim memory of home haunted them to-day, and wondered what made them so hungry. Not a man of them knew what it was that was so different to-day from yesterday. It takes a woman to realize

that the right amount of salt in the turnips, and the absence of lumps in the potatoes, and a hundred other kindred trifles, actually contribute toward making her a better person than she would otherwise have been. There is one other thing she knows, and that is that all these trivialities have a like influence over mankind in general, even though they neither realize it nor admit its truth after they are told.

As for Happy, she certainly did astonish Mrs. Holmes and encourage her. The girl could move swiftly, it appeared, when she chose; she could shut the door without slamming it, and fill the glasses without making a river of water on the cloth. A dozen mistakes she made, of course, but the improvement in her was, as I say, astonishing, and gave the watcher a hint, which almost startled her, as to the possibilities of the transforming power of love upon this unloved one. Midway in the meal Mrs. Holmes became aware that she might relax her vigilance and anxiety so far as the kitchen was concerned, for another hand was plainly at work there. Through the half-open door she caught a glimpse, once, of Mrs. Stetson's face. It was wrinkled and old, and the traces of tears were upon it, but there was also something else—a new look which she could not name.

Liph, in his accustomed seat at the foot of the

long table, ate his dinner in his usual silence; he was nearly always late, and stayed after the boarders had departed; he did so to-day, until only he and Mrs. Holmes were in the dining-room, she with her hand on the door-knob, ready to go.

"You ought to like that lemon pie very much," she said, lingering and smiling.

"I do," said Liph, taking a mouthful large enough to convince her of the fact, "but I dunno where the 'ought' comes in."

"I do; it is because your mother had it made on purpose for you. She told me it was your favorite, and that she liked to have it on that account. When mothers do things on purpose for their boys, the boys ought to like and appreciate them. Mothers are wonderful beings, my friend. Did you ever think what it would be if yours were gone?"

The last mouthful of pie was swallowed, and Liph sat, knife and fork in hand, looking down into his empty plate. His face was grave enough; was it also sullen? Did Liph love his mother?

"She has been telling me of the pride she used to have in you when you were a handsome little boy in a white dress and yellow curls. If I were a boy, I would make my mother so proud of me at nineteen that she would laugh when she told of how proud she used to be when I was two; and never cry."

The door-knob turned swiftly and silently, and Liph was left to himself.

"Happy," said Mrs. Holmes that evening as her pitcher was being filled for the night, "I have been thinking of some things which you said this morning. Did you never read the story I told you about Jesus being mocked and spit upon?"

"I dunno as I ever did, Mis' Holmes; not to sense it, any how: I don't remember it. The Bible is so awful big, you see; and I don't understand it very well."

"You have a Bible of your own, have you not?"

"Not much of a one; it's a little, old, ugly thing, with only one cover, and it's awful fine print. My teacher give it to me years ago, and I used to read in it some; but it is fine print, and there ain't no beginning to things in it, somehow. It kind of hurt my eyes: I give it up a good while ago; but it's kicking around somewhere, I reckon. I ain't seen it this age."

Poor Happy! She could sit up until after midnight with her dime novels, and did, whenever she could elude the vigilance of Mrs. Stetson, without ever thinking of her eyes; but when it came to a question of Bible reading, like many another higher in the scale of being than she, there was lack of time, and weakness of eyes!

CHAPTER XV.

SHE LAYS SNARES FOR ONE.

GOOD afternoon," called Mrs. Holmes, leaning far over the piazza rail to greet Madeline Hurst; "you are coming to see me, are you not? I am all alone. The doctor has carried Mr. Holmes away for a ride, and I was trying to decide how to spend the time. Come up to my room and we will have a cosy visit."

In point of fact, Madeline Hurst had not intended any such thing. It had been several days since she received this lady's cordial invitation to "come and see her very soon," but the girl had had not the slightest intention of "putting herself forward," as she phrased it. The very fact that her sister-in-law was constantly pushing her way into a society which, as society looks at these days, was above her, made Madeline almost fiercely afraid of doing so. The truth is, she had lost many pleasant hours which might have been hers, because she fancied that those

who kindly tried to brighten her life were patronizing her.

“I would rather associate with the Carpenters and people of their stamp all my life,” she had said angrily to her brother's wife once, “than be patronized by those who say ‘poor thing,’ behind my back, or else sneer or laugh at my ignorance of their ways. They do not want me, and I know it; if you would recognize the same thing, and not be forever trying to creep in where you don't belong, it would be better for all of us.”

Such truths were bitter to Mrs. Hurst's soul, and were a fruitful source of much of the angry disgust which these two felt for each other. Therefore, the last thing which Madeline had meant to do was to put herself in the position of appearing to “run after” Mrs. Stuart Holmes. She had meant only to walk by that way, and perhaps see again the bright young face, so little older than her own, and so much fresher and sweeter than hers had ever been; there would perhaps be a chance for a bow and a smile, if Mrs. Holmes should happen to remember her well enough to recognize her, which was doubtful; there might at least be opportunity to look at her, as one would at a picture; and to Madeline's starved and beauty-loving soul this was worth the effort.

But who could resist such a cordial invitation

as this? Especially as Mrs. Holmes immediately vanished inward with the evident intention of meeting her guest at the head of the stairs, having given her no chance to decline. Madeline was embarrassed, half dismayed, indeed, at the prospect, but she went slowly up the front steps and inside the open door.

"This way," said Mrs. Holmes' voice from above. "It is delightful in my room this afternoon; the sunshine gives just the right degree of warmth. Can you fancy how strange that seems to me who have been used to anthracite, and closed doors and windows, for all my Decembers? Take this chair, and let me have your hat. Oh, yes, please; else I shall think you are going every minute, and I want to keep you; the doctor said he should keep my husband away until sunset."

It was not possible to be constrained and formal, and answer only in monosyllables. If this were patronage, it was of a very rare, sweet sort, which Madeline Hurst felt no inclination to cast aside.

"I can fancy your feelings about the Decembers," she said; "until I was fifteen I spent mine among snows and storms; but I liked them as I could never learn to like these soft, sunshiny ones, I think."

"Oh, are you, too, far away from home?" Mrs.

Holmes asked, with that instant touch of sympathy which slightly homesick hearts always have for those in like condition with themselves. "How many people there are who have come away from home! I never realized it so much before."

"I have not," said the girl, with a sort of dreamy sadness; "home has gone away from me; so far away that I can never find it again. I have had no home since my mother died. Mother and I were all alone at the stony old homestead away up in Maine. It was just as dreary a spot, they used to say, as could be found on the face of the earth; and I used to long to get away from it; but never as I have longed to get back to it. Andrew says it is a horrid corner of a horrid country, but, compared with where I live now, I think it was paradise. Andrew is my brother, Mrs. Holmes."

"The brother with whom you live?" the lady questioned, interestedly; she was eager to get hold of this girl's past and present, and discover, if she could, what had wrought premature lines of a certain kind of suffering in her face, and a strange pathetic fierceness in her eyes, if I may use such contrary words to describe eyes.

"Yes'm. There were only he and I. When he came down here in search of what he did not find, mother and I were left alone; I often

thought it dreary, and wished for change; and change came! I would like to go back now, just to be near to mother's grave; it is all there is left."

"Oh, no, dear friend! there is heaven, and mother again, in a home which will never slip from you. I almost know your mother believed in that home, and urged you to be sure to come to her there."

But the girl was already ashamed of her momentary lapse into confidence, and was bent upon regaining full control of herself.

"I beg your pardon," she said, sitting upright among the cushions of the old-fashioned easy-chair; "I am sure I do not understand why I began at once to speak of myself in this absurd way; I never do. Yes, my mother was a Christian woman, and she died happy in the thought that the God whom she served would take care of me. I do not want to talk about her, please."

Young and uncultured though she was, there was a quiet dignity about this girl's manner, which held one back from making advances which she had resolved should not be made. Mrs. Holmes determined not to try to probe further until she was better acquainted and better understood.

"I spent a delightful week in Maine once," she said; "in the summer-time and in the region of

the old camping-grounds. I have some photographs of the scenery about there, and of myself as well. Would you like to see them? Do you like to look at pictures? These came in my trunk unawares. It must have been because I felt that you would like them!"

And she plunged into the depths of the well-stocked portfolio.

What an afternoon it was! Madeline Hurst had never expected to have such an experience. She was barely twenty years old, yet for five years her life had been hardened, and rasped by an uncongenial atmosphere, where she was tolerated for decency's sake; where the very food she ate was at times almost begrudged her; where she had nothing to do which appealed to her interests or tastes; where she was badgered and annoyed on every side. Had the Christian woman who was trying to help her known a third of the story, she would have felt her heart ache in sympathy even more than it did. Oh, of course, there were two sides to it. Are there any stories which have not always the other side? Had Madeline Hurst, a chastened Christian girl of fifteen, gone into her brother's home, bringing with her the forbearance and unselfishness and helpfulness born of the Holy Spirit's influence, undoubtedly the years as they unfolded would have told a very different tale; in fact, she will never know what she might

have wrought in and about the home to which she came. But she brought no such spirit. Instead, she was an eager, passionate, undisciplined girl; rebellious over the fact that the mother she loved had been taken from her; rebellious over leaving the particular school she loved; rebellious over the work given her to do; discouraged, discontented, indifferent as to whether she gave offense to those about her or not. Is it any wonder that the years had been hard to her? It is true that there are some women who would have borne with her patiently, been tolerant of her faults, and waited for time and prayer, and infinite painstaking tenderness and helpfulness, to bear their fruit, but Mrs. Andrew Hurst was not such a woman.

From her two hours of blessed rest and refreshment, during which time she had seen pictures and heard talk such as never had feasted her eyes or heart before, Madeline Hurst awoke as from a dream.

"There is Mr. Holmes!" said his wife, rising suddenly as the sound of horses' feet could be heard; "it is quite time, too. Did you realize that the sun was so near its setting?"

Madeline drew a long, quivering sigh.

"No," she said; "I did not realize any thing except that I had lost myself, and hoped never to be found. I beg your pardon," with a half

laugh, "but you cannot know, of course, what this afternoon has been to me."

Mrs. Holmes regarded her thoughtfully, thinking swiftly the while. Should she? Stuart had been long gone, and there were a dozen things she had meant to talk over with him while he rested, but then —

And then her resolution was taken.

"Oh, don't rise; that is not Mr. Holmes' chair; he likes better the one I have been occupying. I am going to keep you to tea."

"Yes!" with a little playful persistence, as the girl flushed and tried to stammer out a protest; "we have had no company in so long that we are lonely. At home the girls are always dropping in to have cozy little teas with us. They will not be troubled about you at home, will they?"

"They will not think of me at all, unless they wonder what has happened to relieve them of my presence for so long."

"Oh, my dear girl!"

There was such pent-up fierceness in the tone that Mrs. Holmes could not withhold this note of protest. Madeline's cheeks flamed a deeper hue under the implied reproof.

"I beg your pardon," she said quickly, "I do not mean my brother; but, indeed, I must go home."

"Indeed, you must not, if it is not necessary.

I want you to meet my husband. You will like him; every body does," with a happy little laugh.

They were in the upper hall now, he and the doctor. Mrs. Holmes threw open the door.

"Safely back," said the doctor; "this gentleman has gained a pound of flesh, I think, since we went out. As for his appetite, I expect it to be enormous."

He made a sudden pause, seeing a stranger in the room. Was there the slightest possible elevation of eyebrows when he was introduced to "Miss Hurst"? If so, it was gone before Mrs. Holmes could be sure of it, or translate its meaning. He went away almost immediately, but that was to have been expected. As for her husband, Mrs. Holmes exulted inwardly over the exceeding tact and graciousness of his words and manner. It was not surprising, she told herself, that his influence with young people was almost unbounded. How could they resist such hearty, kindly, and withal extremely courteous bearing?

"If he had been acquainted with all the details of the girl's sad life, he could hardly chose his words more wisely," she said, and then caught and stifled a sigh. Was it not strange that such a worker as he should be laid aside for nearly a year, when all over the Master's vineyard the really consecrated laborers were so few?

They went down to tea together, Mrs. Holmes

and her guest, and Happy waited upon them; not in her very best manner; she seemed unaccountably confused, and by no means so full of the irrepressible laugh as usual. Liph was not present, for which the hostess was sorry; she had wondered vaguely whether this girl of another world than his, and yet of so different a world from her own, could not suggest some ways of reaching after and helping a boy like that.

“Her brother might know what his worst temptations were, and hint at something to be done to make them less dangerous,” she had said to herself; “to be sure, he may not be the sort of brother who knows any thing about it, but then he may, and if Madeline herself could become interested in the miseries and dangers of some one beside herself, it might help her. But Liph did not appear at all. As for Madeline, what shall be said of her state of mind? At times she was on the verge of laughter over the thought of what her brother’s wife would say or think, could she see her now seated at this table, which, though plain enough, was more pretentious than that of the Hursts’; but, above all things, seated here as the guest of Mrs. Stuart Holmes! the elegant young stranger who had kept certain circles in the little city on the alert for several weeks in their eagerness to know more of her, to come in contact with her. “And I, Mad-

eline Hurst, am her invited guest! What possessed me to stay? How extraordinary that she should have invited me! But then I stayed all the afternoon, how could she help it?" At this thought the ready blush of shame dyed the girl's cheeks. Comforted she was, however, almost immediately, by the remembrance of the frank cordiality with which she had been received and held.

If Mrs. Holmes did not want her, what possible motive could she have had for calling to her in the first place, and then making it so pleasant that it was hardly possible for her to get away? So for once in her life the sensitive young girl determined to dismiss her morbid thoughts and be happy. She was almost ridiculously happy. She knew she should be ashamed and vexed when she thought about it afterward, that so small a thing as a few hours with a lovely woman, being treated as though she were an equal, should have such power over her.

The large, cheerful room up stairs looked even more cheerful by the light of the softly-shaded lamp, and brightened by the gay afghan which was thrown over Mr. Holmes as he lounged among the pillows.

What a delightful hour it was!

"I am not to be suppressed to-night, my dear," her husband said laughingly to his wife; "I have

rested while you were dining, and am much stronger, I find, than I was a week ago." So he had joined in the conversation, leading it, indeed, some of the time, and Mrs. Holmes, listening, was surprised again to see how well her young guest talked, and what excellent thoughts she had upon many subjects.

"She must have had a good mother," thought the lady, watching the play of expression on the changeful face. "A careful, cultured, tender mother; and she is waiting for her in heaven. And the girl is in danger down here. If I can only save her for her mother!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THEY SEARCH FOR "REAL THINGS."

LATER in the evening, when the lamp was turned low to allow full sway to a flood of silvery moonlight, Mrs. Holmes hoped for an opportunity to get closer to the heart of her guest, and learn, if possible, what dangers beset her way. They were quite alone again, Mr. Holmes having retired to his room for the night.

"Oh, do not go yet," her hostess had said as Madeline made a movement to depart; "I will give you a book to read while I am making Mr. Holmes comfortable, then we will have time for a long talk. I was troubled as to how you were to get home, but I have thought out a charming plan. You know Uncle Tommy, do you not? He is the nicest old man, and a particular friend of mine; he comes this way each evening to bring our mail; his way home lies directly by your door, does it not? Oh, Uncle Tommy will take excellent care of you."

“Care of me!” said Madeline, laughing; “why, I had not thought of such a thing; I am accustomed to going where I please and when I please. I am not at all afraid in the dark, Mrs. Holmes.”

The woman who had been sheltered by thoughtful care all her life looked astonished and seemed distressed.

“My dear girl, I beg your pardon for saying it, but you ought to be.”

“Why, pray?”

“Why? Because Satan and sin are abroad in the world; believe me, dear, it is not safe for a young girl to walk the streets of any city alone at night. It cannot be your duty to go alone after dark, and I can think of no other motive which ought to take a self-respecting girl into such possible peril.”

Madeline’s cheeks were very red, and she bent low over the book which had been placed in her hands.

“Nobody ever troubled me,” she said, trying to speak lightly.

“But somebody may, my dear girl; and, if they should not, you set an example for those less careful of their ways than you.”

But at this Madeline laughed coldly.

“You are really mistaken in me, madam,” she said; “I am not, and cannot be, a fine lady, to put on pretty airs and insist on being taken care of!

There is no one to do it for me if I wanted it. As for my influence, I have none in the world. Who is there that you imagine would quote Madeline Hurst in proof that an act was right or wrong!"

"More than one person," said Mrs. Holmes, earnestly; "people of whom you know nothing, perhaps. It is folly for any of us to declare that we have no influence. Until we can know all the past, and all the future, even as God does, our lips are sealed upon that point." Saying which, she vanished, giving those last words a chance to sink into the girl's conscience.

"You have an interesting study out there," her husband said, inclining his head toward the door; "is she one of your associate members?"

"I am afraid so; I half hoped at first that she might prove an active one, but this afternoon has not encouraged me."

"The soil is full of weeds," he said, "but perhaps she had a Christian mother."

"Oh, she had; a good one, I believe; but she has been long gone, and the poor girl has spent her life of late among thorns."

"Still, perhaps the good seed is not dead, only choked," he said, smiling; "we must adopt her and win her for Christ."

"Do you like that book?" Mrs. Holmes said, returning to her guest a little later.

Madeline gave a slight start.

"Yes'm — or — no — I don't know, indeed; I have been thinking, and reading only sentences here and there."

"You like to read?" inquiringly.

"Oh, indeed, I like it too well; better than I wish I did. The habit of reading every thing I can get hold of is always getting me into trouble. Yet I do not know how I could have lived without books."

"What books do you read?"

"Every thing I can get, as I said; but that does not mean much; my opportunities are limited. There is a circulating library, a small one, from which I have been getting books; but it doesn't help much; I have read and re-read every thing in it, and they only get new books once in an age!"

"What books do you like the best — history?"

"Oh, no, indeed," with a deep blush; "I do not like histories at all."

"Biographies, then, or books of travel?"

"No, I cannot say I like such books; biographies I think I hate. I like stories, Mrs. Holmes, real genuine love stories. I suppose that is very silly, if not worse, and you are shocked with me."

"Why should I be? Am I not supposed to approve of love, my dear girl?"

"Oh, I don't know. They prose about it, you

know, good people do; they think it is wrong to read any thing more exciting than a psalm-book. I like exciting things, such as make me forget my every-day life, and lose myself for awhile at least, in the lives I read about."

"And books which help you to live the life set for you, with a better aim and a truer purpose than before? I like such books. Do the ones you choose help you in this way, Madeline? I may call you Madeline, may I not?"

"If you will," said Madeline, coloring partly with pleasure and partly with shame of the confession she was about to make.

"No, the books I read do not help me, I suppose; at least they make me hate my life more than I did, and that is useless. Oh, I do not choose the best reading by any means. I do not do the best of any thing. I read to help me forget myself, and my hateful surroundings, as much as I can; that is my single motive."

"But, Madeline, is it a wise one? Is there not a better way? If, for instance, there were books which would help you lift your life into an atmosphere which would give you joy and peace, would not that be better?"

"There are no such books; at least I never saw them if there are, and I don't believe there is any thing in this world which would make me do other than hate my present surroundings."

“Very well, let us go beyond this world, then. Is there nothing in the life of God which could do for you what he has for so many?”

Silence for a moment; then, in lower tones than before:

“You mean the Bible, I suppose. I do not read that any more; I used to. I read it with mother every day, and for a little after she was gone, but not long. I couldn’t; it made me feel horrid — worse than any thing else.”

“Poor child! Do you not understand why?”

The silence lasted longer than before; then Madeline’s great eyes, which were almost black, looked full at her questioner.

“I may as well tell you the truth; I suppose it was because my conscience told me plainly that I was not living in accordance with the teachings of the book.”

“And your only remedy for that was to close the book? Oh, Madeline!”

“Well,” said Madeline firmly, rising to the defensive, “I could not help it. As I was situated, it was simply impossible to live by the Bible. When I had my mother it was different, but I told you that you did not understand my position.”

“And I told you that there was One who did. Do you believe it possible that He placed a soul where she could not follow out His dearest will

concerning her? Is that in accordance with your mother's teachings about her Savior?"

Madeline's head drooped suddenly, and again she was silent. After a moment Mrs. Holmes spoke again :

"I do not know how you are circumstanced, it is true, nor, so far as this subject is concerned, does it make the slightest difference, except that those who have not in this life the place they crave, are especially called by the loving One. Have you forgotten how he said, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'? Is not that meant for you, my friend?"

But Madeline was obstinately silent. In her heart was an assured conviction that if Mrs. Holmes knew her sister-in-law, and had to live with her, she would talk and think differently.

And then Mrs. Holmes, who felt that perhaps she had said enough of a strictly personal nature, tried another subject, or, more properly speaking, a different form of the same subject.

"You like to read stories, you say, but you have not made plain to me what ones. There are stories and stories, you know ; some of them I like exceedingly."

"You would not like my favorites." Madeline's tones were growing cold and dignified.

"How can you be sure, my dear? There is

not such a striking difference in our ages that our tastes should be so greatly unlike."

"It is more than age which determines these things," said Madeline, with the air of a sage; "I like sensational stories, such as you would call unreal, overdrawn and all that sort of thing."

"And do you like unreal, overdrawn things, my friend?"

"Yes," said the girl defiantly, "I do. When the real things all about one are horrid, why should not one enjoy beautiful, unreal things, in books at least? What harm can it do?"

"It is thought to increase one's dissatisfaction with reality, and at the same time to offer no remedy. Is that a just charge?"

"I suppose so," said Madeline gloomily; "but that doesn't keep me from enjoying them at the time."

"You have not given me the name of a single author as yet. I am going to see if you do not, after all, like some of my favorites. Do you ever read Miss Warner's books?"

"What has she written? I hardly ever notice the name of the author. You would not approve of that, either. Of course, you would choose your author with care, and avoid a book written by one whom you do not like, but I have little opportunity for choice, and read every thing; so what does it matter who writes them?"

“Miss Warner has written a large number of books. ‘The Hills of the Shatemuc’ was one of my favorites, and ‘The Old Helmet’ was another.”

“Oh, ‘The Old Helmet’! I read that once. I did not like it at all. People talk about unreal characters, Mrs. Holmes; I do not know where you would find any more unreal than those described in that book. I do not believe such people ever lived as that Mr. Rhys, for instance.”

“In that case you ought to be fond of it, my dear; did you not just confess to me that you liked overdrawn books?”

Madeline flushed, and laughed a little.

“I do not mean of that sort,” she said, after a minute. “You think me absurd and childish, but I know what I mean, though I find it hard to explain myself. I have not of late years been in the habit of being asked my reasons for things. The unreal stories which I read and enjoy, deal with society and dress and amusements; things about which one has a right to be as extravagant, on paper, as one pleases; but when it comes to talks about religion and the Bible and matters of that sort, it never seemed to me it was right to picture things different from the reality. I do not think I am making myself very clear, but that is as nearly as I can express my thoughts.”

“I get your meaning, my friend; there is force

in it, or would be, if there were not a very important point which you overlook. What do you mean by unreal things—the impossible or the improbable?”

“Well, the extremely improbable, perhaps. I do not think the absolutely impossible has much charm for me. I never liked fairy stories when I was a child; but a delightful thing which might possibly be, I revel in, no matter how improbable, because I cannot help saying to myself: ‘Strange things have happened, they possibly may again, and they might, some of them, come to me.’ Not that I expect any thing of the kind, either, only it is pleasant to imagine once in a while that I do; but, as I said, when the highly improbable has to do with religion, it is not to my taste.”

“I understand, but let me ask you, suppose these highly improbable things were so only because people chose to take no steps to secure them; and suppose that the moment one chose to make the apparently unreal his own, he could do so; would it not alter your estimate?”

“Of course; but I do not see what that has to do with our argument.”

“Do you not? To me it has every thing to do with it; I have heard the charge of unreality brought against my favorite books before, and there is a sense in which it is true. For instance, it is true that there are few men like Mr. Rhys; I

would not make so strong a statement as you did, for I have known a few who were much like him, but I grant you there are few. Now, the infinite difference between Miss Warner's extreme characters and those of many extreme characters in fiction is, that hers represent not only the entirely possible, but they produce before us the picture of what it is our manifest duty as Christians to strive to become. Can the same be said of any of the books to which you are referring?"

"No," said Madeline, promptly, "nothing of the kind could be said, and I never before heard anybody say that it was possible to be as good as Miss Warner made her characters. I'm sure I should like to see some who were like them!"

"But, my dear friend, is the pattern held up in that book any better than the one which the Bible calls for when it says: 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service?'"

"Perhaps not, but then who does it?"

"That is not to the point. You know the question is not so much 'Who does it?' as 'Who will?' If Madeline Hurst, reading of the pure and beautiful life of some fictitious character patterned after the man Jesus Christ, is moved thereby to the remembrance of Him who was not fiction, but glorious reality; who lived on earth, and loved and died in order that we might be conformed to his image; and if she resolves because of it to try

from henceforth to order her life after that pattern, has not the unreal and unnatural character accomplished a blessed result?"

"Then you think it is all right to be unreal in religious fiction?"

"If by unreal you simply mean, as I suspect, not common, and if the picture is something which might be real, this is, in my judgment, the realm of legitimate fiction, and its only excuse for being at all."

"Well," said Madeline, drawing a long sigh, after a minute of silence, "I confess that I have a stronger hope of suddenly falling heir to a hundred thousand dollars and exchanging my one room in the attic for a palace, as the young lady did in the last novel I read, than of growing into such a perfect character as Mr. Rhys, or even as Elinor did, after she became his wife!"

And then Uncle Tommy came with the mail, and the evening was gone.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHE FINDS AN "ACTIVE MEMBER."

MRS. HOLMES, as she looked after them down the moonlighted street, wondered sadly what she had accomplished, after all. The girl was bright and interesting, but so positive in her views, and so narrow in her range of thought! She seemed almost as far away from that one perfect life as poor Liph himself.

"And I did not say a word to her about Mrs. Carpenter," she added, with a self-reproachful start. "After all, of what use would it have been? The poor child cannot help her, not until she is helped herself. And what is there that she will let reach close enough to help her?"

She was on the lower piazza, whither she had gone to see Madeline off, and have a minute's talk with Uncle Tommy. She walked back and forth in the moonlight, full of sad thoughts. How was the work to be done, any of it? There

were so many now in whom she was keenly interested, yet she was making no progress.

“It is very strange,” she told herself sadly, “so many and yet so utterly unlike one another, and so unlike any persons for whom I have ever worked before. I cannot help being interested in them, yet I do not seem to be the one to accomplish results. Some of the time I even repel. I wish I could have discovered the names of some of the books which Madeline Hurst reads; they seem to have a strange influence over her. They cannot be like Happy’s selections; the girl has too much mind for those.”

As she walked back and forth thinking her troubled thoughts, she heard footsteps approaching, and was surprised to see Uncle Tommy returning.

“Why, Uncle Tommy,” she said, going to the gate to speak to him; “are you coming back? I thought you had started homeward for the night. Have you seen my charge to her own door already?”

“I started home, ma’am, but had to turn around and trudge back because I forgot something I was to bring. Uncle Tommy never could depend on his head to save his heels, and grows worse as he grows older. No, I didn’t see her to the door, ma’am; she met with some one whose company suited her better than mine, and said I

need not trouble further, though it would have been no trouble at all, of course."

"Met some one? Did she meet a friend?"

"Aye, and he turned and walked with her, and seemed glad of the chance, and she likewise, or at least willing; so there was nothing for me to do but turn and leave them."

"A gentleman was it, Uncle Tommy?"

"Aye, at least that is what he calls himself. I make no doubt there might be two opinions about that."

"Was it her brother, Uncle Tommy?"

"Oh, no, ma'am; not her brother."

The old man did not seem disposed to say any thing more, though she waited in hope that he would give her the name of Madeline's friend. She was disturbed, she hardly knew why. Certainly it was not an unusual state of things for a young woman to have a gentleman friend who could with propriety join her in an evening walk. Nevertheless she could not help feeling troubled. Truth to tell, Mrs. Holmes was strongly tempted toward discouragement to-night. The reaction from the nervous strain caused by her steady effort to entertain Madeline Hurst, was upon her, and perhaps helped to make her mental vision less clear than usual. She could almost have cried out with the prophet of old, "I, even I, only am left." There was so much needing to be done, and no

workers! Here, for instance, was Uncle Tommy, a clean-faced, neatly-dressed, self-respecting old man, whom every body liked and trusted; who was so true to his word that it had passed into a sort of proverb among the people of his neighborhood, "It is as sure to be done as though Uncle Tommy had promised it." Yet it came to her suddenly, standing there, that she had never said one word to the old man on the one important theme! His hair was whitening fast, and the time he had to spend on earth must of necessity be short. Was any one interested in where he would spend his future? Who was trying to help him settle so important a question?

"What is a gentleman?" she asked, dreamily, more for the purpose of seeming to be friendly with the old man, and yet carry out her own train of thought, than because she was interested in his reply.

"Well," said Uncle Tommy, straightening himself in the moonlight, "there might be different opinions about it; looking on at folks, I've no kind of doubt that there are; but if you ask for my views, why, according to my way of thinking, there is only one kind of true gentleman, and that is a man who is keeping to the road He traveled, just as near as he can."

There was such intense reverence in the use of the first pronoun, that it did not need the rever-

ent uplift of Uncle Tommy's bared head to tell the listener to whom he referred. There was an instant lighting up of her expressive face, and she reached forth her hand impulsively.

"Oh, Uncle Tommy, do you know Him? Then we are kindred."

"I do that, ma'am," said Uncle Tommy, clasping the soft young hand in his old and wrinkled one. "I've been traveling on after Him for nigh on to forty years, and I reckon I'm coming pretty nigh to the turn where I shall see His face. It's a curious thing," and his old face rippled into smiles, "I've thought about it a great deal, and it's a very curious thing, but there comes a time when He lets us catch up with Him and walk along arm in arm."

"Do you mean here?" asked Mrs. Holmes, in a voice which was almost awe-stricken. Uncle Tommy's face shone in the moonlight almost as though it might have been the face of an angel.

"No, ma'am, I mean there; though I've come to think, of late years, that we've a right to get a good deal nearer to Him here than the most of us have understood."

"I have found an active member," said Mrs. Holmes to her husband the next morning. You can not think what a surprise and joy it was to me. I had almost grown to think that there were no Christians here. Well, of course I do not

mean that, exactly, but you know we have not come into intimate acquaintance with any, as yet. I do not know of one professing Christian in this boarding-house, and I had some way forgotten that there were any. Where do you think I found him?"

"I can hardly imagine, if you have come in contact with him since I last visited with you," her husband said, smiling. "I had the impression that that dark-faced, fierce-eyed girl was the only one you met yesterday. Did he call upon you?"

"Oh, no. I met him at the gate."

"At the gate! Ah, you mean Uncle Tommy? Oh, yes, I knew he was a prince of the Royal line. I had a little talk with him one day last week when you were out, and he came with letters. He is a blessed old saint, and has had a troubled voyage. He told me he was so glad to lie by in a quiet harbor for a little while, and make the shore through still waters. He was once a sailor, and his language is filled with the imagery of the sea."

Mrs. Holmes was quiet, with a sort of grave sweetness upon her face. She had had another surprise. The husband whom she supposed too ill to speak or think of Christian work, yet at his very first opportunity had a word of inquiry ready for the man who she thought had been neglected.

Perhaps there was everywhere a great deal more work being done than she imagined. The story of the old prophet came to her, and she smiled as she repeated mentally the words, "I have left me seven thousand in Israel."

It was destined to be a morning of surprises. Mrs. Holmes, when she went down to see about her husband's breakfast, had another. She had just come from an encounter with Happy. That young woman had been met at the head of the stairs, water-pail in hand, a generous supply of the liquid which it had contained when she started having been left on a number of the stairs.

"Land!" she had said, "I b'lieve this pail leaks; or else I swashed it about. Don't drag your dress into it, Mis' Holmes; though I dunno as it would do any hurt if you did. Dirt seems to slip off of you, like water does off of a duck's back. It doesn't do so with me; every blessed thing that can stick to me, does."

"Happy," the lady had said, interrupting this steady flow of words, "I have something for you which I hope you will use. When I was a young girl," she omitted to say how young, "I had a large-print Bible, neatly bound, which was a great pleasure to me. Every week I had a new verse marked in it, in red, or blue, or green ink, and that verse I was pledged to read, at least once each day. My Sunday-school teacher gave me

the book, and I promised her I would be faithful to the daily readings. I learned to enjoy them very much. Now I have found a Bible as much like my copy as I could, and marked one verse. Will you take the book, and promise to read the verse each day for a week, and then let me mark another?"

"Oh, land!" said Happy, giggling much, yet looking pleased, "I can't read in the Bible; but that's an awful pretty one. It doesn't look a mite like the one I used to have."

"It is only one verse a day," said the lady, in a persuasive tone, "and the print is large; it will not injure your eyes."

Happy's eyes were as bright as jet beads. She laughed consciously over this sentence, then said, blandly: "Well, I don't mind, if it ain't but one verse a day. Land! I'd do more than that for you; only I don't see why you care. What color did you mark it in?"

"Red," said Mrs. Holmes, promptly, "a very pretty red called carmine; and I wrote your name on the fly-leaf. Now, Happy, in giving you this for your own, of course I trust you; it is a token, you see, of the pledge between us that you will read the verse each day."

"Oh, I will," said Happy, setting down her pail, to rub her hands upon her soiled apron before taking the neatly-bound volume in charge,

then looking with admiring eyes at her name written in full. "I declare for it," she said, "it ain't a bad-looking name when it is written pretty. My! It must be fine to make such writing as that. I admire pretty writing, Mis' Holmes. I've got a friend," and now there was a conscious blush and that ever-present giggle, "who can write nice, too; he wrote my name once in a book; but it ain't done as nice as this, and I mean to tell him so. I most always keep my word, Mis' Holmes, when I really and truly promise, down-right; and I will this time, so there!"

Happy looked as though she had made a great concession to the prejudices of the lady, one for which she deserved thanks. She received them, Mrs. Holmes wondering, meantime, whether the fair little seed dropped into such unpromising soil would ever spring up and bear fruit.

"I placed a card book-mark in the place where the verse is marked," she said, as she turned away. "You will like the card, I think; and you can change it from week to week to the newly marked verse. This is Saturday, is it not? I think on Sunday, one week from to-morrow, will be a good day for a new verse."

Then she had gone down stairs, leaving Happy to look at and exclaim over the card book-mark. She might well have liked it. Mrs. Holmes had given it an entire morning of careful work. The

name "Hepzibah" was made in delicate vine-wreathed letters on the center of the card, and winding about it on a spray of Southern jessamine were painted the words: "Shall the Lord 'delight' in thee?" While the lady worked, she had had a dim consciousness that many, perhaps most Christian workers, would consider this as time thrown away, a sort of "casting of pearls" before those unable to appreciate them. How could Happy be expected to understand the delicate hint in the question, or appreciate the careful workmanship? Yet the girl loved pretty things, and had always a bright-colored flower or weed tucked into her frayed button-hole, or perched jauntily among the masses of her frowzly hair. Who could tell, after all, what this bit of beauty might do for her?

From that encounter Mrs. Holmes had gone, first to the kitchen, then to the piazza, to wait; the scarcest thing in Mrs. Stetson's kitchen was hot water, freshly boiled; it had nearly always to be waited for. Mrs. Holmes walked slowly back and forth, busy with her thoughts, and did not see Liph Stetson until his voice startled her.

"Mornin', ma'am. You was talking about something the other night which made me think last night that may be you could do something there, if you had a chance; and I thought I'd just

give you a hint, if you can keep dark as to where you got it."

This extremely lucid beginning surprised and half frightened the one to whom it was addressed. Was she expected to enter into partnership with Liph Stetson and "keep dark" as to his schemes? Uncertain how to reply, she concluded to let a kindly smile and question do for response.

"Can I help you in any way?" and the smile might have won a statue into response.

"'Tain't me," said Liph, succinctly, "only you talked that way, as though you was looking out for folks, and I thought maybe you might"—there he stopped.

"Yes," said Mrs. Holmes, encouragingly; "is there somebody I can look out for: somebody who is in trouble or danger?"

"That's just it; I dunno about the trouble; I guess she don't think it is any trouble to speak of; and as for danger, why, that's the way folks look at it; but you said if I had a sister, you know"—

Another full pause. "I remember," said the lady, on the alert. "You see something ahead that, if the person were your sister, you should call danger. Is that it? Are you speaking of Happy?"

"Happy!" exclaimed Liph, with a disdainful toss of his shaggy head and a sort of indescribable

sniff; "no, I ain't! There's a girl that ain't a bit like her, that that fellow is making up to and going around with, and making believe he is some, and I dunno how much he means nor how much he don't mean; only he's a scamp, if he is a gentleman, and maybe you, bein' a woman, would think there was something you ought to do or might do, though I dunno what it would be."

Mrs. Holmes was very grave and keenly attentive. This mysterious matter, whatever it was, evidently meant serious business to Liph Stetson, and he was making an unusual effort. She wished she knew how to aid him in his unwonted work.

"Do you mean Mr. Arson?" she asked, lowering her voice, though there was no person within hearing.

Liph nodded emphatically. "I do that, ma'am; and he is real out and out, downright what you might call mean, though he is high enough up in some things, and goes to places where such as me would get kicked out. And he goes to some other places where even such as me wouldn't be seen going!" There was terrible significance in tone and manner. The startled woman felt that the boy of nineteen, far down the road to ruin, knew what he was talking about.

"Only," said Liph, beginning again, and lowering at her from under his shaggy brows, "that

ain't a thing to be told over; I'm in scrapes enough now, without having to stand a chance of being half killed, telling of things that ain't supposed to be none of my business. If you can't keep dark, and if I hadn't had a notion that you could, why, then" —

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHE DISCOVERS A "LOOKOUT COMMITTEE."

I WILL be very careful, indeed," said Mrs. Holmes, earnestly; "you shall not be gotten into any trouble through me. Will you tell me the name of the girl whom you think may be in danger?"

"She's a girl that lives on Seventh Street, just out of Green. She lives with her brother, and her name is Hurst—Mad Hurst they call her. I dunno what her real name is; that is some kind of a nickname, I s'pose. But she is a nice-looking girl, and she ain't got no mother, nor folks, to take care of her much, and her brother wouldn't take no notice of any thing I'd say, and would just as lief get me into trouble besides, and I thought maybe"—

Liph's full pauses were more eloquent than his words. Mrs. Holmes felt herself trembling with surprise and apprehension of, she hardly

knew what ; but she controlled herself to answer reassuringly :

“I understand ; thank you. I will be very careful, and will do what I can. You were right to tell me about this. It is good to be on the alert in this wicked world to save people from danger. It gives me courage to think that you mean to save yourself. You have a mother, you know.”

But at this Liph turned away, his duty done. Evidently he had no intention of applying the lesson of his good deed to himself.

“Wait just a moment,” Mrs. Holmes had called after him, and, moving forward, had spoken low : “Tell me, please, why you thought of this just now. The person is not here.”

“Yes, he is,” said Liph ; “he got back last night.”

It was a very grave and quiet woman who went in due time up the stairs with a pitcher of hot water and a plate of toast. She had almost nothing to say as she prepared a dainty morning meal, even to the poaching of an egg by the aid of her invaluable alcohol lamp. She was certainly a success this morning in keeping her hands busy with one line of work and her thoughts on another.

Were the “fellow” of whom Liph Stetson warned her, and the “gentleman” about whom Uncle Tommy spoke, one and the same? If so,

what influence had he over Madeline? What was he trying to do with her? How far was Liph's judgment or truthfulness to be depended upon, and in any case what could she do about it? Grave enough questions, certainly. No wonder they kept her quiet to the degree that her husband watched her with a shade of anxiety upon his face. Was this fair Christian whom he had himself helped to rouse to earnest endeavor, going to indulge in her besetting sin again, and overwork? Yet even while he thought, and was on the verge of speech, there was a sudden lighting up of the grave face, and she turned toward him, smiling :

"Stuart, my society is growing. Last night, you know, I found an active member, and this morning, don't you think, I have discovered a 'lookout committee'! I am not going to tell you about it, not now, because you must eat your breakfast, and the doctor said I must entertain you while you ate."

"Your lookout committee is not entertaining, then?"

She laughed softly.

"There are circumstances under which it might be, but there is a story connected with it, which you shall hear when you are stronger."

"I am stronger now," he said, sitting upright; "you and the doctor pet me altogether too much.

I give you warning that I am not to be done in pink cotton and laid aside much longer. I'm almost ready to become an active member again myself, Chrissy."

This time her laugh was free, and her face aglow with gladness. The happy wife remembered that whatever anxiety and danger there might be in the world her own cup of gratitude was full to overflowing.

"Chrissy," called her husband on the afternoon of that same day, as she was passing through the room, "have you something on your programme which demands an hour or two of absence? And, if so, is not that useful maiden, Hepzibah, with her inevitable book, needed elsewhere than at my door?"

His wife halted before his chair in smiling wonder. "What does all this mean? Do you feel anxious to be rid of me for that length of time?"

His answering smile was very bright. "I have been wondering whether I could not entice that poor fellow over here to look after my needs for awhile, on the plea of benevolence, or something of that sort, and so find opportunity, perhaps, to speak a word to him which might be helpful. I have been watching him sitting over on that grocery step. He is the most dreary-looking person I have seen since we came here. I have a longing desire to try to reach him."

“Do you mean Liph? Oh, poor fellow! there he is. He sits on that door-step nearly every afternoon, and appears so dreary and aimless. What a thing it would be if some power sufficient to arouse him could take hold of the boy!”

“Whoa!” said the clear voice of the doctor, and he reined in his ponies before their door.

“Ah,” said Mrs. Holmes, “instead of my going out for an hour, I think it will be you; the doctor is in search of company, I presume.”

But having carefully questioned his patient, and expressed satisfaction with his progress, Dr. Portland turned to the lady:

“Have you broken your contract?” he said, with an air of great gravity.

“My contract!”

“Yes, your contract. Do you mean to say you ignore it? It will not do, madam; I am perfectly familiar with evasions of that kind; still, I admit I did not expect it of you. Did not you promise to take me into partnership? And did not I expressly stipulate that there should be no third party to the concern?”

“Oh, well, I have kept my pledge, or, rather, your pledge; if I remember correctly, I made none. But I have said almost nothing to Mr. Holmes about my friends and their needs since that day.”

“Oh, ‘Mr. Holmes!’ Who has mentioned his

name? That is just like a married woman; she believes there is only one man in the world, and he has the honor to be her husband! Mr. Holmes, I entered into a business contract with this lady—I was to give advice, and, otherwise—in short, assistance to the best of my ability, to her patients of all sorts and conditions, and only stipulated in return that I should be sole partner in the concern; and, behold, to-day I discover a rival in the person of Uncle Tommy.”

“Uncle Tommy?” repeated Mrs. Holmes, startled and a little disturbed. What had he been saying to Dr. Portland? There was an instant fear lest Madeline Hurst was involved in some way. She waited anxiously for further words, but the doctor regarded her with a serious face and an air of mock disapproval.

“Do you call that honorable treatment, Mr. Holmes?” he continued, still addressing her husband. “Here is Uncle Tommy stopping me on the street when I am in great haste, and calmly giving me advice concerning my own patients. ‘I think, sir, the madam at Mrs. Stetson’s would do something for her—something that you and I cannot do.’ Those were his words. ‘You and I,’ indeed! As though we were equals in skill and experience, and ‘the madam’ was superior to us both!”

“A patient of yours!” said Mrs. Holmes,

relieved. Madeline Hurst was not ill, for she had seen her in the distance that morning. "Who is there that I can help, Dr. Portland?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. If Uncle Tommy is to be believed—and he is evidently a partner—you can do more than I; which is not saying much, for I frankly confess my inability to do any thing to speak of. The question is, how do you reconcile it with your conscience to have made a confidant of Uncle Tommy, after my express proviso."

"Sit down, Doctor," said Mr. Holmes, "and tell us what you are talking about."

"I haven't time to sit, and I'm talking about a sick woman who lives two miles out of town, and to whom Uncle Tommy says 'the madam' can do more good than either he or I. I give myself credit for great discernment. I did not so much as ask Uncle Tommy what madam he meant! There was a sort of intuitive perception about it. It only remains to learn whether she will take a seat in my carriage, and be driven out to the said sick woman's to try her skill."

"What is the matter with the sick woman?" demanded Mr. Holmes, with such emphasis that the doctor faced around to him and answered with great gravity, "It is a case of small-pox and typhoid combined, with a touch of yellow fever, or something of that sort, thrown in."

“No, but seriously, doctor, of course I can not allow Mrs. Holmes to go where there is any grave disease. She is not strong enough for any thing of that sort.”

“Oh, I have not mentioned any thing grave, you know—just those trifling ailments! Seriously, my friend, do you suppose for a moment that I would ask your wife to go to a place of danger? The woman of whom I spoke is gravely ill, I fear, but it is a case of mind more than body. She is simply broken down under the weight of a life which has been too much for her. If you could ride out and speak a word to her, Mrs. Holmes, there is a possibility that you might bring a little comfort into her tired heart.”

One of those sudden changes of which this mercurial doctor was capable had come upon him. He was gravity itself, combined with a certain gentle deference which became him well. It ended, of course, in Mrs. Holmes accompanying him on this new mission of mercy. Not very courageously, it is true; her brief experience as a Christian worker had not brought her into contact with the abject poor, either among sick or well. She had grave doubts as to her being able to meet Uncle Tommy's hopes in these directions. She questioned the doctor as they rode, hoping to learn something of what was expected of her, but, if he understood, he did not offer to enlighten her.

"I am a novice in these lines," he said. "The poor woman evidently needs something which is beyond my reach, and which Uncle Tommy thinks you can supply; whether you can, or not, remains to be seen."

What a home it was into which this young novice in human sorrow was presently ushered! A single room, which served as dining, kitchen and sleeping-room for five persons! Three children, in various stages of disorder and discomfort, hovered about a bed, on which lay the suffering mother.

Poor Chrissy Holmes, with her dainty tastes and over-sensitive nerves, never forgot that picture of suffering and misery. Mrs. Carpenter's one clean room was a palace compared with this!

"The very first thing needed here is water," she said to the doctor in a low tone; "and soap and towels and clean sheets and pillow cases."

"Hard to compass," he said, surveying her with a composed satisfaction which was exasperating; "water I could secure, but the other articles mentioned are beyond me, I fear."

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked, reproachfully; "I could have brought so many things!"

"How was I to know the style of ministration expected of you?"

Mrs. Holmes turned from him in grave displeasure. The easy, bantering tone seemed to

her, heartless. But in a moment she glanced back to say with decision :

“Get me some water, please ; at least, the poor creature can have her face bathed.”

A moment more and she had shaken out and dropped into the suspicious-looking hand basin which the doctor promptly produced, a plain linen pocket handkerchief.

“It feels good,” said the poor woman, gratefully, as the cool water touched her burning skin ; “I’ve been too sick to try to do any thing for myself, and the young ones are too little to help. He does what he can, nights, when he gets in ; but it ain’t much a man can do, when he’s been to work all day, and there ain’t any thing to do with. I’ve been sick nigh on to four weeks now, and no washing done, and there ain’t a clean thing nowhere.”

It was too evident that she spoke the truth. The very little which Mrs. Holmes could do with water and a pocket handkerchief was soon accomplished ; and, after a very short talk with the woman, her resolve was taken.

“Dr Portland, I shall have to be driven home and brought back here ; there are a dozen things which this woman needs that I could have supplied had I known the state of things. There is nothing to be done now but to go for them.”

“Very well,” said the doctor, in utmost gravity,

quite as though he had devoted his life to carrying people and parcels to and fro. "I am entirely at your service for the afternoon."

It was a silent drive for several minutes. At last Mrs. Holmes began her investigations:

"What brought about such a state of things—rum?"

"For a wonder, no; it is generally at the bottom of this sort of poverty; but the man does not drink, at least not often, and is a decent sort of a fellow."

"Then, why are they so wretchedly poor?"

"They are incapables, Mrs. Holmes; in intellect both husband and wife are children. They assumed the responsibilities and duties of man and woman at an age when they should have been reckoned as children, and have been retrograding ever since. The man is stupid and shiftless; a little boy instead of a man. He earns his dollar a day quite frequently; but if he does not feel like work, or the work which offers is not exactly to his mind, why, he drops out and waits for something better. His wife spends the little money he brings her in a perfectly inane way. If she chooses to have spring chicken at a time when they are sixty cents a pound, why, she has spring chicken, without regard to the fact that those towels and sheets and other small matters for which you were looking are *non est*. In like man-

ner, if both husband and wife want to take the children and go to a show of any sort, and the required quarters can be raised, they go, taking no thought for the morrow. If they want a gold watch, or a brussels carpet, or any trifle of that sort, they buy it, generally on the installment plan, and take all the comfort they can out of it during the brief time in which they may call it theirs."

CHAPTER XIX.

SHE ILLUSTRATES THEOLOGY.

THE installment plan?" said Mrs. Holmes, in bewilderment.

"Has that ingenious device of His Satanic Majesty for swindling the poor, escaped your notice? In brief, it is managed after this fashion: You are Mrs. Jenkins, we will say, and need, or are fully convinced that your future well-being depends upon a fifteen-dollar mirror, worth in extreme figures two dollars. It so happens that I am Mr. Skinflint, agent for Messrs. Cheatem & Co. On the very day when the extreme limit of your patience has been reached and you have declared that life without the fifteen-dollar mirror is insupportable, I appear to you with a bland face, and the mirror under my arm, and explain that I have been unable to sleep nights on account of your forlorn condition without that mirror; I have resolved, under the circumstances, and merely as a matter of charity, to do some-

thing for you which I could not think of doing for many people, and therefore it is earnestly desired that you will keep the matter a profound secret. I have determined to sacrifice myself, and allow you to buy that mirror, by giving me a dollar a week until all is paid. I will give you a receipt in black and white for every dollar; and you will have the exalted privilege of using the mirror from the very minute that you pay your first dollar. And at this unparalleled benevolence on my part I am tempted to shed admiring tears. Certainly such sacrificing disinterestedness is rare in this wicked world! The mirror is set up, and you, Mrs. Jenkins, worship at its shrine; and I, Mr. Skinflint, appear as promptly as the day, after that paltry dollar. If it so happen that work continues, and all goes well in your household, by dint of much starving of the children, and much doing without the aforesaid towels and sheets, in fifteen weeks you are the happy owner of the two-dollar mirror, and Messrs. Cheatem & Co. are richer by thirteen dollars than they were. But this is an unusual state of things; the Jenkins household does not, as a rule, move on in such even lines; the more probable experience is that work will fail, or some of the smaller members, of whom there are always several, will get sick, and on the seventh or eighth visit there will be no dollar forthcoming; I, being

still a most benevolent Mr. Skinflint, will express my deep regret, and go to the extreme limit of indulgence and wait a week; at the end of that time the probabilities are strong that you, Mrs. Jenkins, will be no better able to pay the two dollars then due than you were to pay the one; and I, with many regrets, indeed almost with tears, take the two-dollar mirror under my arm and march sorrowfully away. I have received nine dollars for it, we will say, and I shrewdly suspect that the Jenkineses, through continued misfortunes, will not be able to give me any more; so I carry the mirror to Mrs. Jones, on the next block, and proceed to sell it again at fifteen dollars. If I am a good, reliable agent, and if life is reasonably hard during that season on Ninth Street and vicinity, I may sell that precious mirror for as much as fifty dollars, and have it in my possession, as good as new, when the spring opens. Do you get the points?"

"But surely, Dr. Portland, such infamous cheating can not be going on to any great extent?"

"Why not? I assure you there has been no reason yet evolved by this benevolent world why it can not. The installment business, as just explained, is a favorite one I am inclined to think, in most cities of any size; certainly it is a favorite one here. After taking out that omnipresent and all-important agent, rum, it may safely be set

down as the next best business for ruining the poor which has yet been discovered. I know of dozens of families where it is being carried on with a degree of success and perseverance which would arouse your admiration, if you understood it as well as I do."

"Dr. Portland, why do not people do something to save the poor and ignorant from the grasp of such persons as you have been describing?"

"My dear madam, what would you suggest? This is a free country, and the average citizen has a right to ruin himself, financially and morally, if he will. Even if the system invariably worked misery and ruin, I presume a free and enlightened nation would license the business, for a consideration!"

Mrs. Holmes seemed to have no answer ready, and they drove on in silence for some minutes. Then the doctor spoke again in grave earnestness.

"Mrs. Holmes, this visit has started me on one of my hobbies. I feel deeply over this subject of the honest and incapable poor. The woman to whom I have introduced you is, as I have intimated, a typical case. She married young, long before she ought to have been through with girlhood—the most of her class do. She married a man even beneath her in intellect and judgment; as a rule, most women of her class do that also. She did not know how to keep her house or rear

her children; she did not know how to buy food or clothes; she did not know how to manage either, after they were bought. She is at the mercy of the sharpers of this world, who see in her and her husband, willing dupes, from whom can be extorted the small earnings which ought to be used in the support of their family. For this large and constantly increasing company of incapables, almost nothing is being done systematically. When they reach a situation of absolute want, a humane individual, or society, will take hold of them, furnish food and clothing, and nurse them back to life, if possible, only that they may go through the same miserable story again and again, until the common poor-house receives them, paupers in name as well as condition, or until the grave closes over them. As for doing something for them which shall work a radical change in their condition, save them from paupers' graves at last, next to nothing is being attempted, at least in this part of the world, and very little any where, unless my knowledge is greatly at fault."

"But, Dr. Portland, what could be done?"

"Pardon me; you ought to know much better than I. If there is any thing in the church of which we hear so much, it ought to be able to take hold of this problem with a will, and work results which should tell for future generations. How to buy and cook and make and mend and

plan and systematize—that is what the decent poor need, more than they do tracts or Bibles, in my humble judgment.”

“I beg pardon, doctor, but it seems to me that just now you are talking about a phase of the subject which you do not understand. There is solemn truth in all you have said, only if you understood and ordered your life by the Bible, you would see at once that it is of all things what the ignorant poor, and all other poor mortals, want, and that if the world but followed its plain directions all the wrongs would be righted.”

The doctor regarded the flushed face and flashing eyes of the speaker with a curious smile. Presently he replied: “You may be right; I acknowledge that I am meddling with a subject which I do not pretend to understand, but I am sometimes unable to forget that when I was a youngster somebody taught me what purported to be Bible words, which ran something like this: ‘By their fruits ye shall know them.’ And I am only anxious to see a little of the fruit; for a harvest of that sort is sadly needed, as sure as you live. Why, even the graveyard secures an annual harvest of little children from this very city, for the simple reason that a thousand mothers in it have not the least idea how to take care of their babies. Now, Mrs. Holmes, since we are upon this rather grave and bewildering subject, will you

permit me to ask you a question which has often bewildered me? It is undeniable that there is a great deal of misery in this world, which you, for instance, would set right if you had power. Why, even such a worthless fellow as I, come every day in contact with distress which it would not take me half a moment to banish, if I only could. Given a Being who has all power, who has but to speak, and the thing is done—and that is, I suppose, your conception of God—the question is, why does He permit the evident evil which exists?”

Mrs. Holmes could hardly hold her lips from curving into a smile; this was so like the passionate outcry of her school-girl days; it seemed such an infinite pity that this keen-brained man had gotten no further!

“It is a question easy to ask, but difficult to answer,” she said, quietly, “when the questioner is not a Christian. I might remind you that I heard you one day commend a mother in unmeasured terms because she steadily refused what her child was coaxing and crying for. You remember that the mother, by this firmness, caused the child much suffering, which another child standing by, with no more judgment than the suffering one had, would most probably have instantly relieved had the power been his.”

“Ah, but, Mrs. Holmes, is not this begging

the question the least in the world? The food for which the poor child was crying would have wrought infinite mischief, but what you and I propose to do we believe, and can even see, ought to be done."

"Am I God," said Mrs. Holmes, with exceeding gravity, "that I should presume to arrange his work for him?"

"Then you really think that my rascally agent ought to have sold his two-dollar mirror for fifteen dollars?"

"Have I said any thing to make you think me so devoid of common sense? I did not know you were quarreling with the fact of sin, but rather arraigning God for his attitude toward it."

"Well, the one thought includes the other, does it not? Would not you and I abolish the fact of sin if we could?"

"I do not know. If we had that power, we might manage the world very differently from the way we think we should. Dr. Portland, I might be able to tie the hands of a child, and in that way keep him from the act of stealing, but would I not rather leave him free to do as he would and teach him to will not to steal? In other words, do you mean that you think God made a mistake in giving us the power to weigh, to reason, to decide? Would you rather be a machine obliged to run in a certain groove?"

Dr. Portland laughed lightly.

“My dear madam,” he said, “I was brought up on discussions of the will, and total depravity, and matters of that sort. I heard them in my cradle. That is the reason why I know nothing whatever about them now. No, I would rather not be a machine. It is a fact that I enjoy the power to weigh and choose, but so does my friend Mrs. Jenkins, of whom I have been telling you, and the truth is that it does not seem to me that it is good for her to be so allowed. If she and all the great sisterhood which she represents could be set back into childhood with a stroke, and commanded to do this, do that, go here, go there, it would be infinitely better for her, and I can not help seeing it.”

Tears sprang to Mrs. Holmes' eyes, and her voice was full of feeling.

“Ah, but, Dr. Portland, you forget; in order for women to be benefited by the controlling voice, they must be willing and glad to be controlled and led. Given that, and how entirely you have expressed the need and the Lord's provision for it! Has he not made it possible for every one of us to choose to be children, led by his voice, by his smile, by his love? Believe me, dear friend, the trouble lies in the reckless determination of the child to manage for himself.”

The remainder of that day was spent in such

evident practical Christianity as must surely have delighted the heart of Dr. Portland. Mrs. Holmes most unceremoniously and with energy pressed him into service. Before the early twilight had come upon them, another trip had been made to the sick woman's home, and this time the carriage was laden with a score of articles deemed by the lady in charge absolute necessities. The doctor looked on, silent and amused over some of them, and sat on the ridge of the seat to make room for them, and handled them with care and skill when their journey was over. On the whole, though Mrs. Holmes felt almost dismayed over the poverty of her resources, the sick-room, and, above all, the bed, presented a very different appearance when at last they turned homeward.

"She has dropped into a quiet sleep," said the doctor, coming on tiptoe from the bedside, whither he had gone to take a professional last look; "when she wakens she will not know herself, and somebody ought to be here to introduce her to her husband. That is what I call Christianity, Mrs. Holmes."

"It is only one phase of it," said that lady, quietly, "and the founder of Christianity rated it quite as highly as you can."

In the evening, when she occupied her favorite seat on a low hassock in front of her husband's invalid-chair, her hand resting on his knee, she

produced one of the questions about which her mind had been revolving.

“Stuart, how long did you live in that queer fashion about which you were telling me a few days ago — when you were in college, you know?”

“What, boarding myself? Why, I spent the last year of my college course in that interesting way.”

“Why did you do it? I do not understand. I thought Father Holmes was always in good circumstances, and delighted to help you through your course.”

“He was and he did; helped me royally, as mere money could never have done; he was a blessed father, Chrissy. But about the boarding myself, I had a special reason for that. Bravado some of the boys called it. Perhaps there was a touch of that element in it, though I remember I was indignant over the suggestion. Boys do not understand themselves as well at the time as they do when they can look back upon their lives. There was a fellow in college, Chrissy, in whom I was interested in a peculiar manner. He was very poor, and inclined to consider poverty an insuperable barrier to many things which else he could have attained. He was sorely tempted to give up his college course because certain hoped-for moneys failed him, and he had a precariously small amount to depend upon. I urged him to board

himself, and insisted that he could do it on the sum which he had; the other boys said he couldn't. I pressed the matter, and grew eloquent over it; finally offered to prove it by actual personal illustration. So I fitted up the room next to his and went in; cooked my own food (what could not be bought ready cooked), and managed the bill of fare for him as well as myself; gave him not a cent's worth of help, and carried him through the year in triumph on healthful food and enough of it. The only partnership business we had was in the dish-washing, and over that we quarreled frequently. Why are you wearing so radiant a face, my dear little wife?"

"Oh, Stuart, I wondered if there were not some such explanation. It is like you! that is all one who knows you need to say. And it gives me courage to talk over with you the strangest fancy. What is needed, Stuart, among the poor, is to do on a larger scale just what you did for one, and to do it by practical illustration, too. If there were only a large, plain house here where a few people could start the scheme, I should like so much to show them how to live comfortably on very small sums of money. They do not know how to buy food, Stuart, nor to prepare it after it is bought; and they live in such desolate homes, when they might have comforts, and even luxuries. But to do any thing of that sort it

would be necessary to go and live among them, and manage every thing for a time, and live just as they did."

"What an immense scheme! It fairly takes my breath away. Is that what you and the doctor evolved out of your charitable trip to-day?"

"I evolved it out of his cynicisms. He charges Christianity with indifference and criminal neglect of the honest poor; and the worst of it is I am afraid there are grains of truth in his criticisms."

"Well, dear, I believe I am ready to join you as heartily as possible in any plan which is reasonable. We must talk it over, and think it over. We are not in such entrancing quarters here that it would involve a tremendous personal sacrifice to make a change. But what would become of poor Mrs. Stetson in such an event?"

Mrs. Holmes looked troubled.

"Yes," she said, "and Liph, and Happy? It was those two I wanted to get hold of. Oh, Stuart, I am afraid there is no way of doing that, or any thing, for them."

"Yes, there is," the sick man said, heartily; "He has a way; he has sent us here to help them; we must let him lead. There will be a 'next step' by and by, Chrissy."

CHAPTER XX.

SHE RECEIVES, TO ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP.

IT is a pity that Mrs. Holmes could not have had a picture of Hepzibah Smithers, as she set her 'smoky little lamp on an over-turned box which did duty in her room as a toilet table, and drew her one wooden-seated chair toward it for the purpose of fulfilling her pledge and reading that marked verse in her Bible. There was an air of resoluteness about the girl, as though she had resolved once for all to enter martyrdom and conquer the verse before she slept. She was very tired and unusually sleepy; the little wads of discomfort over in the corner, which she called a bed, looked most inviting to her, yet the memory of her emphatic "I'll do it," held her before the box and book. "When I promises I promises," she said, stoically, and opened the Bible.

She might have been awed had she known with what painstaking, prayerful care Mrs. Holmes had selected the marked verse. In truth, that lady

had been long in doubt which pearl out of the wondrous treasure-box to choose. The familiar one so often used occurred to her: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But she shook her head over it; it was too high, too wonderful, for Happy. She did not understand that she was in any danger; she felt no need of an infinite Savior. In like manner, the tender calls of the compassionate One to the "weary" and "heavy laden," did not seem to fit the present moment. Happy might be "heavy laden," but she did not know it, in the sense which the call meant. Her choice at last was one which bewildered herself; when she came to think it over afterward it seemed not suited to Happy, yet the persistent way in which her thoughts went back to it while she was searching, and the persistent impression that here was the verse to be marked, was not to be resisted: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but will confess his name before my Father and before his angels."

What did Happy know about overcoming? She did not even want to know! Nevertheless, this searcher after lost sheep made her heavy red lines about the words, and wondered why it was

that she must choose thus. The "Chief Shepherd" knew. If Happy did not understand the word "overcome," there were certain other words as she slowly read them which caught and held her thoughts. Certain experiences of that very day had prepared her to be thus held.

She had met that afternoon, on her way to the grocery for molasses, Mr. Arson and "that Hurst girl" walking together; walking slowly, absorbed apparently in conversation; at least, Mr. Arson had been so absorbed that he came almost upon Happy, staring and blushing, before he saw her at all; then he actually frowned, and made not the slightest attempt at recognition.

"He doesn't want to own that he even knows me," said Happy to herself with a heart swelling with indignation; then she looked after the two, eagerly, longingly; stopping on the street corner regardless of observation, to do so. What a thing it must be to have a whole afternoon when one could dress up and walk the streets, and be talked to by the man who was bending his head toward Madeline Hurst! And Madeline was clothed in a dress of spotless white, without so much as a touch of color about her. Madeline knew that the dress was coarse and plain, and that she was outgrowing it, but Happy did not; to her eyes the girl was dressed like an angel. Do you get a conception of what the unfamiliar

Bible words may have said to the poor dark heart?

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment.” Somewhere Happy had heard that word “raiment,” in connection with her novel-reading, and understood its meaning; she caught her breath over the sentence, and read it again. Here was a chance for somebody; these words were in the Bible, and she had a vague feeling that what was in that book was somehow true. The way to secure the “white raiment” was as Sanscrit to her, but it was something to feel that there was a way, and that Mis’ Holmes could tell her how to find it. “And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.” What did it mean? She did not know. Only it was nice not to have your name blotted out, of course. She liked her name on the fly-leaf of this book. She would like to see anybody dare to blot it out! But over the next sentence she fairly held her breath: “I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.”

“He darst to own that he knew me,” she murmured; “and before angels and all! That Hurst girl wouldn’t be much by the side of a lot of angels, I guess. Oh, dear me, I wisht I knew!”

She leaned her elbows on the dry-goods box and bent herself forward over the book, reading the startling words again, slowly, carefully, to

make sure that they were really all there then; lifted her eyes to the dingy wall before her and said again, "I wisht I knew!" but this time she added, after a moment's thought, "And I mean to; so there!"

What she wished she knew was what it meant to "overcome." "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak," said the great apostle hundreds of years before. Was he in this, as in other things, but faintly copying his infinite Master, who was at that moment bending to the weakness and almost ridiculousness of poor Happy's conceptions, which were "of the earth, earthy"? "That I might by all means save some," said Paul. And it may be he understood some of the "means" he was directed to use as little as did Mrs. Holmes, who sat in her room at that moment deploring her folly in having chosen a verse infinitely beyond Happy's understanding.

"Look here, Mis' Holmes," said Happy, next morning, waylaying the lady as usual on her transit from the breakfast table; "I read the verse over three times; what does it mean?" There was no giggling now; instead, there was intense earnestness, and a certain reserve force of determination behind the words, which impressed the listener.

"Which part of it, Happy?" she asked, to give herself time to plan how to answer.

“The very first of it: ‘He that overcometh’; them’s the words. How do you do it, and what is it, any way?”

Here was a question, truly! Mrs. Holmes, half-way up the stairs, was expected to pause and answer that over which theologians had been studying and writing tomes for centuries! She sat down on a stair, the better to do it.

“Happy, it means those who take Jesus for their pattern, and try every day to do the things which he likes, and to keep from doing things which grieve and disappoint him; all such overcome the temptations which Satan sets for them, and show by their lives that they are following Jesus. Then, when the time comes, he takes them to his home, and introduces them to his Father and the angels as his friends.”

“Oh, my!” said Happy, but her face was grave. “Folks don’t do it, though, Mis’ Holmes, none of ’em.”

“Don’t do what?”

“Right; always, without ever making mistakes, and forgetting, and all that. Leastways, I never saw ’em if they did.”

“But they try, Happy. If you had a little sister who wanted to please you so much that she tried every day to do just as you did, wouldn’t you love her, even though she didn’t get any thing she did, quite right?”

“Yes'm, I should that!” said Happy, with energy.

“And don't you think if she kept on trying every day, she would certainly after a time be able to do a great many things right; even the things she had failed on at first?”

“Course,” said Happy, confidently.

“Then, that is, as nearly as I can explain to you now, what Jesus means by ‘overcoming.’ It is in the first place a fixed resolve to follow his directions—not to follow them to-day and neglect them to-morrow; not to do as He pleases one hour and as you please the next hour; not to say, ‘Maybe I will do it, sometime.’ You could not think that your little sister was honest in her desire to please you if she managed in that way; neither can He. It is, as I said, a fixed determination to follow his directions, always, everywhere, no matter what they lead to. That is the first step.”

Happy stood considering. Mrs. Holmes had never seen her face grave for so long a time before, when it was not in a frown. She watched the girl with a kind of tremor in her heart, lest she should not have said the right words to her in this which was evidently a crucial moment. She was hardly prepared for the next question.

“Well, what's the next one?”

“The next what, Happy?”

"Step. You said that was first; what's next?"

Mrs. Holmes' face lighted with a reflection of the thrill of gladness in her heart: this looked like decision.

"To tell Him about it, and claim his help."

Now poor Happy giggled; not as though she were amused, but embarrassed, almost distressed:

"Oh, land! Mis' Holmes, I can't. I s'pose you mean prayin'; now I couldn't!"

"Happy," said Mrs. Holmes, earnestly, "it is just as simple a thing as it is for you to stand here talking to me; more simple, because He can understand what you mean, even though you do not know quite how to express it. There are no large words necessary, nor sentences such as you may have heard used in prayer, and did not understand. It is simply saying: 'Lord Jesus, I have made up my mind that I want to overcome. Show me how to do it.'"

Mrs. Stetson's voice sooner or later always summoned Happy. It called her now in peremptory tones, and the girl went away swiftly, without another word. As for Mrs. Holmes, her face, though glad, had a strange solemnity upon it as she went about her morning work. Had she been given a glimpse into the "Holy of Holies," wherein the Savior of souls came down to the level of this feeble little soul and called it? Could she have looked in upon the girl that even-

ing, she would have been sure of it. Happy was near the dry-goods box, and the open Bible had a faint streak of soil upon it near the red-lined verse. But the smoky lamp had been suddenly quenched; Happy could not have told why, only she seemed not to want it. The light of the full moon flooded the desolate little room and touched even its few worn-out belongings with a kind of beauty. And angels, listening, heard spoken, in low, awe-stricken, yet steady tones, these words:

“Jesus, I’ve made up my mind. I want to ‘overcome’ and be owned before the angels, as you said. I don’t know how, but she said you’d show me, and I mean to do it. When I promises, I promises.”

And the angels knew that, from that wonderful moment, although the way might be long and tortuous, and the mistakes so many as to almost discourage poor human patience, yet, nevertheless, the day would come when this poor little earth-worm, kneeling in her attic, would be presented by the King to his Father and the holy angels, with exceeding joy; and that she would be “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

“I am going to call on Madeline Hurst,” said Mrs. Holmes to her husband, appearing before him dressed for a walk, after she had made all things comfortable for his afternoon rest; “I do not know what to say to her, and am half-fright-

ened at the thought of saying any thing; yet I seem unable to let the matter rest. How are people to be saved from themselves, Stuart?"

"By the expulsive power of a new affection," he said, smiling almost wistfully upon her.

Occasionally this man, who had been taught some lessons in the school of affliction, wondered almost timidly how his wife would be taught to trust the part which was not for her to manage.

A frowzy-headed, most slatternly-looking girl answered Mrs. Holmes' ring, and announced that "Mis' Hurst" was out, and "Mad" was up stairs sick.

"Sick!" repeated the caller, anxiously. Madeline seemed like one who needed but a slight illness to prostrate her. The girl, on being questioned, "guessed she wasn't much sick; she coughed some, but she mostly did when she took cold, and she took cold about every time she stirred. She hadn't seen her to-day, but Mis' Hurst told them that she could have come down to dinner if she had wanted to."

Over the anxiously-put question whether the caller could be allowed to go up and see her, the girl frowned and puzzled. She "didn't know, she was sure; Mis' Hurst was away, and folks that come a-calling didn't commonly go up stairs. She hain't got her room fixed up for callers," the girl added, with a half-embarrassed giggle.

“You may ask her if she will see me,” said Mrs. Holmes, with decision; “tell her I would like very much to spend a little while with her if she is able. Take this card to her, please.”

Poor Madeline’s cheeks were burning with fever, and her head ached so she could hardly read the card which was thrust into her hand. It is humiliating to have to confess it, but I am afraid the feeling uppermost in her heart was that if she permitted her caller to come to the attic-room, it would be the surest way of mortifying her sister-in-law. She gave one swift glance about the low, dreary room, with its one curtainless window, save for a newspaper pinned against it, with its uncomfortable cot in place of a bed, and its utter absence of the usual furnishings of a young woman’s room, and, with a smile which would have grieved and frightened Mrs. Holmes, said:

“Yes, let her come up. She will understand some things better than she does now, after she has spent five minutes in this room.”

It was perhaps an hour afterward that Mrs. Holmes, on her way through the lower hall, came upon the lady of the house, who had just entered the front door.

“Mrs. Hurst, I believe?” she said, in answer to that woman’s stare of astonishment. “I am Mrs. Holmes. I think, madam, you cannot know

that your sister is quite ill. I have been with her for the last hour, and she grows steadily worse. Her breathing is becoming very labored, and I fear that, unless promptly relieved, she will have congestion."

"The idea!" said Mrs. Hurst. It seemed a strange reply to make to such information, but the fact is, the only portion of it which the bewildered and dismayed woman had realized was that Mrs. Holmes, the elegant stranger whom she had watched at a distance with envious eyes, had actually been to her attic spying out its bareness! Her face flushed angrily at the thought; she knew only too well how the attic looked. What unparalleled impudence it was in this upstart woman to force herself into other people's houses!

"If I can do any thing," said Mrs. Holmes, hesitating; "I came down to see if I could find you, or somebody else, and speak about a physician. I shall pass Dr. Portland's office on my way home; if he is your physician, I could leave a message."

Then Mrs. Hurst rallied to the emergency.

"You are very kind," she said in a tone which was intended to be dignified, "but there is no occasion to trouble you. My sister-in-law is accustomed to these attacks, and I know what to do for her. She is inclined to make a great deal of a little sickness, and has frightened you, I sup-

pose. I know how to deal with her. There is nothing to be alarmed about."

But now Mrs. Holmes' cheeks were red also, and her eyes very bright.

"Indeed, madam," she said earnestly; "pardon me for saying I feel very sure that you are mistaken. I am accustomed to illness, having recently nursed my husband through a long, severe attack, which was not unlike this in its beginning, and was allowed to get too firm a hold before we understood it, or realized the danger. I am confident that when you see her you will decide that a skilled physician should be summoned at once."

"Oh, very well," said Mrs. Hurst, loftily; "if Mad is frightened, she can have a doctor, of course; but we by no means wish to see Dr. Portland; we would not employ him to doctor a cat!"

There was nothing for it but to go away filled with anxiety over one who seemed so friendless. The disturbed caller felt that she would almost rather have left the girl alone than trust her to the tender mercies of such a woman. Madeline was right in one respect; Mrs. Holmes understood better now the sort of life the poor child must lead.

CHAPTER XXI.

SHE TURNS SURGEON.

WELL of all things in this world!" was Mrs. Hurst's exclamation as the door closed after her visitor; "if I ever in my life saw any impudence equal to that! I wonder how that hussy came to show her the way up stairs! She ought to be discharged this minute to pay for it. 'Dr. Portland,' indeed! I think I see her sending him here!—That is just like Mad; any thing to create a sensation; but it is too outrageous to think she let her come up stairs! I believe she did it just to spite me!"

Before that evening was over, both Madeline and Nancy wished they had not been so rash. Though truth to tell, poor Nancy, out of whose hands the matter was taken altogether, could not understand why she should be blamed; but blamed she was most roundly. The entire Hurst family heard nothing else but the story of Mrs. Holmes' insufferable insolence, and Mad's mean-

ness and Nancy's stupidity in aiding and abetting it. Under the influence of the general disorder, Mr. Hurst made a remark which placed him under the ban of disapproval also.

"Well," he said, "I don't see why you can't keep things decent, so you needn't be afraid to have folks go up stairs when it is necessary; there are fancy gimcracks enough in the parlor to make Mad's room decently comfortable, if the money spent on them had been put there."

You will be ready to admit that this was hard upon Mrs. Hurst, for the "gimcracks" in the parlor were her idols.

It was two days before Mrs. Holmes saw Madeline again; she called on the day following her first visit—was assured that "Mad" was better, needed nothing, and could not be seen; on the second day, having knocked gently at the open front door and been unanswered, she waited a minute, then ran lightly up stairs and tapped at Madeline's door. She was even more shocked at the girl's appearance than on her first visit, and could not help feeling that this sickness was serious. Madeline was alone, and evidently glad to see her caller, though she expressed surprise at her coming.

"How did you get permission to come up here again?"

"I took it," answered Mrs. Holmes, with a

quiet smile; "the door stood invitingly open and my knock was unanswered; so, as I knew the way, I took the liberty of coming up."

"Good!" said Madeline, her eyes glowing with a strange luster which was not pleasant to see; "come up in the same way whenever you can; it is the only way you will ever get here, and it annoys Mrs. Hurst so much that it does me good."

"My dear girl, do not say such words, even in jest; I am sure you do not mean them."

"Don't I!" said Madeline. And then Mrs. Holmes made haste to change the subject.

"Are you really better?" she asked; "do you cough as much as you did? What physician attends you?"

"Madam Hurst."

"My dear, have you not seen a physician?"

"Only the one I have mentioned; she prides herself upon her skill. Doesn't she impress you as a woman whom I ought to enjoy having nurse me?"

"I think that is wrong," said Mrs. Holmes, gravely; "I am sure you ought to have a doctor."

"Never mind a doctor," Madeline said, leaning wearily back among the pillows, after a violent spasm of coughing; "I do not think I care to see one; not of her kind, and I can compass no other."

I am glad you have braved the consequences and come to see me; you do not know how disagreeable they are, but, all the same, I am glad you have come. Perhaps I became sick in order to give me a chance to think; I need to do some thinking, Mrs. Holmes, and I have almost made up my mind to ask you to help me decide something."

"If I can help you in any way, I shall be glad; but will you tell me what you mean by 'braving the consequences'? Does it make it harder for you to have me come here?"

"Never mind," said Madeline; "she is jealous of you because you have had the kindness to notice me, and have not noticed her; she would be jealous of a kitten if it purred for me; so it is nothing against you personally, you see; never mind her, Mrs. Holmes; I want to talk to you, to ask you something. I have spoken very plainly to you, more plainly, perhaps, than I ought, for my self-respect; I ought to shield my family, of course; I know enough about common politeness for that; but I had an object in speaking, and in letting you see something of my life. It is quite intolerable to me, Mrs. Holmes; really and truly I can endure it no longer! I know a way out; but the way is almost as disagreeable as the life I now live; in some respects, indeed, it is more so, but in others it would be a manifest improve-

ment. Can you give advice under such vague conditions as that?"

"I might, my friend; that is, if I may be allowed to ask a very few questions and receive frank answers."

"Oh, questions!" said the sick girl, nestling uneasily on her cot; "I am afraid of those; especially when you ask them. Still, of course, I ought to answer, when I have asked advice."

"The first one is very simple and easily answered: 'Would it be right to take the step which you say would in some respects improve your condition?'"

"This is the very worst question to answer," Madeline said, and, flushed with fever as her face was, Mrs. Holmes could see that the glow deepened. "The truth is," she added, after a moment's silence, "it is a phase of the subject which I do not want to consider at all. I want to look at it from the standpoint of expediency alone."

"Then," said the lady, with quiet firmness, "I can not answer you. I aim to order all my acts in life with that question in view, as the leading consideration."

"That would be inconvenient, I should think," the girl said, laconically.

After a few moments of silence she began again, still in that restless, half irritable tone:

“You can theorize, I suppose. What if a home and friendship and protection, were offered to a lonely, desolate girl and she felt reasonably sure that she could do her duty by the one who offered it, is there any good reason why she should not accept such an escape from misery, even though she—she”—and then poor Madeline stopped, her face aflame.

Mrs. Holmes felt that she was sitting on the edge of a precipice; or, what was worse, watching the feet of another who was very near the edge, and whom a single false movement upon her part might precipitate over the brink. She tried to keep face and voice in utmost quiet, while she questioned, “Are you speaking of marriage, Madeline?” It was evidently a more direct reply than the girl expected, and she hesitated before she said:

“Suppose I were, what answer would you make?”

“There can be but one answer. If there are no obstacles such as self-respecting people consider, to prevent a marriage, then the all-important question which each soul must answer to itself before God is, ‘Can I honestly take with this person the vows which God and the laws of the land make necessary to a legal marriage?’” In other words, ‘Do I love him with the sort of love which I give to no other, so that he is

the one man on earth to whom I could so bind myself?' Any other marriage than that, Madeline, is perjury in God's sight."

Madeline turned her small, hot pillow angrily.

"How many people do you suppose marry in that way?" she asked, almost with a sneer.

"I do not know, my dear girl; nor do I see what the question has to do with the subject. As well ask me how many false people there are in the world, in order to prove that there can not, and need not, be such a thing as truth. Entirely aside from the Christian standpoint, I do not see how there can be moral decency in any other marriage than the one I have described."

"But, Mrs. Holmes, a good, true man, who loved and respected a woman might give her the protection of his name, and care for her all his life, it seems to me, even though she could give him in return only friendship."

Madeline's tones had changed; the fierceness had died out of them, and they had almost a pleading sound which went to Mrs. Holmes' heart. But she resolutely shook her head.

"It will not do, dear. No good man could respect a woman who would consent to take vows upon her lips which her heart did not echo. I can not conceive of the possibility of a good man wanting a wife who did not love him. God has so ordered it that marriage shall be a faint, but,

so far as it goes, honest, type of the union between the soul and Christ. It is dishonoring to Jesus Christ to belittle the type, and make any of its terms other than strictly true."

"I do not know anything about such high-toned reasoning, you must remember," said poor Madeline, coldly; and Mrs. Holmes, reflecting, wondered whether she would do better to drop to an illustration which was of the very dregs. "Did you ever hear Mrs. Carpenter talk about how she married for a home and for protection?" she ventured to ask. But Madeline's swiftly changing face grew dark, and her eyes flashed angrily. "I am talking about a very different person from Joe Carpenter," she said, in intense scorn.

"That is, he seems very different to you now; but, Madeline, if he is one worthy to be loved and respected, believe me he would accept nothing less than love from the woman of his choice; and what men who are not worthy, will become, only the God whom they insult can know. From a merely selfish standpoint, even, it is not safe to trust them."

Then she had the benefit again of a pair of flashing eyes.

"I thought Christians were expected to be charitable!" the girl said, fairly biting off the words. "Do you call that charity, Mrs. Holmes, to see no good in anybody who is not governed by the nar-

row rules which hedge a few people in? I should call it narrow-minded and shallow."

And then Mrs. Holmes knew that the poor child was quoting from some one who was trying to be her leader, and who had already warped her judgment by a few high-sounding phrases about "larger liberty" and "wider outlooks." She was talking very much in the dark, yet grew every moment more certain that Madeline Hurst was considering herself and Mr. Arson; that she did not love him, but imagined she respected him, and had been made to believe that his love for her was so great he was willing to give all, and receive only this cold return. If only the girl would confide in her fully, so that she might speak plainly! She had not been hurt by the last rude outburst; it was so manifestly the utterance, in borrowed words, of a tortured mind which did not fully know what it was saying. Her voice was never more gentle than when she ventured to break the ominous silence:

"Madeline, I am talking blindly, of course; I do not know why you asked the question you did, but you asked, you know, and I have tried to answer. I can not expect you to confide in me, for I have known you too recently to win your confidence; but I love you, dear child, and my heart goes out in a great longing to help you. I can not help knowing from observation, as well

as from the few hints you have given me, that your life just now is a hard one, and I can readily imagine that you are sorely tempted to take some rash step, which you may spend what will seem like an eternity in regretting. Let me beg of you to wait and think and pray, before you do any thing which your enlightened conscience disapproves. Remember that you have been too well trained in the years gone by, to really approve a lie, no matter how glossed over it may be by smooth-sounding words. I beg your pardon for giving the matter a personal turn, which perhaps your words did not justify. I think I am feeling more keenly than usual, just now, in these directions. I am looking on with fear and trembling over the possible wreck of a life very differently situated from yours, but fully as lonely and friendless. Do you know that poor little Happy Smithers who works at Mrs. Stetson's?"

"I have seen her," said Madeline, turning her pillow again, and becoming every moment more conscious that her head ached violently.

She was already ashamed of her angry outburst of a few moments before, and was beginning to wish that she had asked no questions, but kept her tormenting thoughts to herself. It was very hard to try to appear interested in Happy Smithers. She did not think she cared what became of her.

“And do you know any thing of a boarder at Mrs. Stetson’s by the name of Arson—a young man?”

Then Madeline opened her eyes, and fixed them full upon her caller. They seemed almost to burn the lady as she steadily returned the gaze, but all that the sick girl said was, “I have seen him, too.”

“I could wish that poor Happy never had!” The words were spoken with a sigh, partly for Happy, and partly because it was evident that Madeline did not mean to confide in her.

“Why?” A short, sharp word from the cot, that demanded answer, and told a great deal which the questioner did not mean to tell.

“Because that young man is trying to deceive her, and is succeeding; what his motive may be, those who know him better than I do will have to imagine. I know that he shows her attentions such as honorable men keep for their nearest and dearest; that he gives her presents such as she ought to know enough not to receive; but poor Happy is quite ignorant enough to be duped. He takes surreptitious walks with her under cover of the darkness, and parts with her with kisses which can only mean disgrace.”

Not for a moment did she take her eyes away from the burning ones; after the first random sentence, she had been sure that she was not mis-

taken, and had resolved to go on to the humiliating end, and give this warning before it was too late. She had decided that it was better that the girl had not confided in her; she could speak the more plainly.

“How do you know that you are not repeating a set of miserable lies? That girl is a street pauper, who does not know how to speak the truth, I suppose; she would consider it a fine thing to tell such tales of a gentleman.”

Madeline's voice did not sound as though her heart had received a death-blow, but rather as though her self-respect had been rudely handled, and she was burning with indignation. The steady eyes did not droop before the piercing ones, and Mrs. Holmes answered quietly:

“The girl never mentions his name, so far as I know. I know of the gifts from having seen them in his hands one hour, and in hers the next, being proudly shown as from a friend; the poor thing seems to have sufficient sense of propriety to mention no names, or else is tutored not to. I know of the walks, and the partings, and indeed of some of the words exchanged, from the same reliable source. I have trusted only my own eyes and ears as witnesses to the tale I tell.”

This entire conversation had been frequently interrupted by distressing paroxysms of coughing; and Mrs. Holmes, between the moral doses which

she had felt compelled to administer, had also done what she could for the physical, but at this point the cough became so distressing, and the weakness which followed the paroxysm so extreme, that the looker-on was visibly alarmed.

“Indeed, Madeline,” she said, anxiously, “I can not think you do right to let this illness get such a hold upon you. If I could see your brother I would certainly interfere and beg him to secure a physician at once.”

“Don’t!” said the girl, panting for breath, and holding her hand to her throbbing heart. “I do not want a doctor; I want the disease to get such hold that it will not let go—I want to die! If ever any person had reason to be utterly tired of this false, hateful world, I have. In some respects I am in worse condition than Mrs. Carpenter, because that disgusting, mumbling, drunkard husband of hers loves her after his fashion, and is true to her. I hope I shall die, Mrs. Holmes, and see mother for a few minutes, any way. It is all there is left to want.”

While Mrs. Holmes stood amazed and sorrowful over these wild, foolish words, uncertain what response to make, the door opened and Mrs. Hurst appeared.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE DISCOVERS HIS OPPORTUNITY.

DR. PORTLAND, who had been driving briskly through the sand of a country road, reined in his horses and regarded attentively an object which sat on a fallen tree in the sunshine; it had a slouched hat on the top of its head, and limp hands in its pockets; its entire attitude was one of mild discouragement and apathy.

“Is this you, Joe, or your ghost?”

“I reckon it’s me, doctor,” said the object, turning its watery blue eyes in his direction.

“Are you sober?”

“Ain’t drank a drop since” —

“Since the last time,” said the doctor, as Joe stopped to fix a date. “Where are you going, or where do you expect to go, when you can coax yourself to leave that old pine stump?”

“I’m on my way home, doctor; I’ve been out to the Hall place on an errand and got so far back.”

“Well, jump in and I’ll take you back before you would have made up your mind to start.” Whereupon Joe moved with alacrity; a ride behind the ponies which were at once the envy and admiration of all the boys in town, was something which had never fallen to Joe Carpenter’s lot before.

“It is too bad for you to be such a worthless old fellow as you are, Joe,” the doctor said, when they were started.

“I know it,” said Joe, with becoming gravity. “I’ve thought it more times than you have, I’m dead sure.”

“That is very possible; I do not remember ever thinking much about it until lately; but when a fellow like you succeeds in setting the mind of a good woman into a ferment over him, it seems to me it is time for him to think for himself.”

“I know it, a better woman never lived; honest as the day, and hard working; keeps everything clean and neat, with nothing to do it with; it is too bad!” Joe’s face was gravity itself; nothing could be plainer than that he was in deep earnest.

Doctor Portland’s face was a study; the half-amused, half-sarcastic curl of his lip gradually changed, as Joe’s sentences rolled out. Actually he could not help having a touch of respect for

this miserable wreck of a man; who, low as he had sunken, was not yet low enough to speak other than with kindness, even with tenderness, of his wife. Had the wife been unknown to Dr. Portland, the poor fellow's words would have produced no such effect; but he understood perfectly that she never omitted an opportunity to set his sins before him in their darkest hue; that she was coldly sarcastic when she was not worse; and that in short the place which Joe had most reason to shun, was the one he called home.

"Of the two, I pity poor Joe the most," the doctor had said more than once. Now he almost felt that of the two he could respect Joe the most.

"I was not speaking of your wife," he replied gravely, "though I know she has qualities which you ought to respect; my reference was to quite another woman; one who takes the trouble to think about you a great deal."

"Me!" said old Joe, and his monosyllable, some way, expressed not only intense surprise, but pathos.

"I dunno who it can be; mother used to care about me, but she's been gone this twenty years and more; and there never was anybody else."

"I mean a good, true woman who is very anxious concerning you, and would give much to see you a different man. You must have seen the

lady who is boarding at Stetson's? She has been here but a few weeks and has an invalid husband."

"The little woman with pretty hair, and eyes that make you think of stars and sunshine? Yes, I have seen her; she comes to our house sometimes; and she sends more than she comes; Mad Hurst let me know where the things come from that helped my wife through her sick spell; and though you wouldn't think it, I'm grateful to anybody who does things for my wife; but you are mistaken about her caring any thing for me. She ain't never spoke one word to me."

"Nevertheless I tell you she is deeply interested in you. I have heard her say so. She must see in you something which the rest of us haven't. She thinks you could do more for your wife than all of us put together, if you would."

"You mean about work, doctor? Well, now, it's curious how scarce work is in this place—for me, anyhow; I've been four miles into the country this afternoon in search of a job I heard of, but I couldn't get it. I do work whenever I get a chance, now that's a fact."

"I don't mean any thing of the kind, Joe, and you know it. I mean whisky. Haven't you brains enough to know that the reason work is scarce, is because people can not trust you? You may go off in the middle of an important job and get on a spree and not be seen for days. Why

should any body in his senses employ such a man as that?"

"I know it, doctor," said Joe with the grave air of a philosopher contemplating a fact in Natural History; "I'm not complaining, I'm merely stating a fact."

The doctor lost patience. "Look here, Joe Carpenter," he said sharply, "I do not see any sense in your talking in that way. It would do very well for an idiot, but really you are not one, yet; why should you ape the manners of one? Why don't you rouse to the situation and act like a reasonable being?"

Poor Joe did not so much as turn his weak eyes in the speaker's direction; instead, he looked gravely at the wheel, from which particles of sand were steadily falling, and was silent for several seconds. When at last he spoke there was a curious undertone of pathos, though his words were slow and quiet enough.

"Doctor, you wouldn't think it, I suppose; I wouldn't have thought so myself once, but the stark-naked living truth is, that I can't do it!"

"Can't do what?"

"Give up the blamed whisky. There'd be no use in trying to tell you how often I've tried; why, as many times it seems to me as there's grains of sand in this road; and meant it every time, and made a dead failure. I didn't sense it at first; I

thought it was accident, or mistake, or something of that kind, and of course I'd get hold of the thing at last. But I didn't; and at last it dawned upon me that I couldn't. Mother, she told me once that I'd git where I couldn't, and I didn't believe her."

A less scientific man than Dr. Portland would have had some glib, encouraging answer to make; but he, looking at the bleared eyes, the enfeebled lines about the naturally weak mouth, and watching the trembling arms and hands, was silent. An embarrassing silence it was to him, though Joe did not seem to feel it so; he looked meekly grave and contemplative, still.

"You have days when you do not drink, though?" the doctor said at last, putting the tone of a question into his words. Joe nodded. "Yes," he said, "I do; and that's what fooled me along at first. I says to myself, says I, 'Joe, if you can stand it four days at a time, why can't you forty? and after forty days maybe things would get different somehow.' But it wa'nt of no use!" shaking his head sadly, "I stuck it out most two weeks, several times; and once nigh on to two months; but when one of them raging spells of thirst come on me, it didn't make no difference whether it was weeks or months since I'd had a drop; I couldn't no more manage them than I could a wild tiger this minute! You don't know

nothing about it, of course; and my wife don't. That's what tries her so, and I don't wonder; but there it is!"

This was certainly a very remarkable turn for the conversation to take. But for his strange embarrassment the doctor could have laughed. Joe seemed actually to be apologizing for his wife; because, not being able to appreciate the strength of his temptation she was hard on him! But there was some thought which held his mentor silent and unsmiling. At last he spoke, with evident effort:

"Joe, the lady of whom I told you, looks at these things in a different light from what you do. She evidently understands, in a degree at least, the strength of the appetite, but she believes that there is a Power outside of himself which a man can bring to bear upon it, if he will. In other words, she believes that God, the God whom she worships, stands ready to help any poor wretch who is willing to put himself in the way of help, and follow directions; so that these terrible fits of thirst of which you speak shall be held in check by His Almightyness. What do you think of that?"

A singular change had come upon Joe's face while he listened; his bleared eyes were turned from the wheel and the sand, and their gaze fixed fully upon the doctor's face; the muscles of his

lips twitched almost convulsively, and something like a thrill of energy seemed to run through his loosely-jointed frame.

“What does she know about it?” It was the first short, decisive sentence Dr. Portland had ever heard this wreck of a man speak.

“She has had experience, it seems. Has known of a man, or of men, several of them, who by this means have conquered the appetite, even when far under its influence, and have gotten back their manhood. She believes that you could; and moreover, she believes that such a course would save your wife from the mental wreck which she will almost certainly become, unless relieved from the fearful strain which is upon her now.”

He was speaking quite glibly; if there was a shadow of manhood left in the fellow, certainly the statement which he had now boldly made, ought to rouse him. He was hardly prepared for the question which followed.

“Doctor, do you believe it?”

“Do I believe what?” spoken almost sharply. There was that in Joe’s voice which made him feel that the question was not asked with reference to his latest communication, but had to do with a subject about which he knew less.

“That she’s right in what she thinks; and that a fellow like me could get a hold of some-

thing or somebody—it would have to be God, for there ain't any mortal could, I know that—to help him when the spells come on? Say I've brought 'em on myself; and I know it is true; I've told myself so a hundred times; I know there was a place, away back, where I could have let the stuff alone; but say that time is past, and it's my fault that it is, does she mean, and do you mean that such as me could get hold of this Something?"

How was the gay, mocking, skeptical young man to answer such a question? A man who had less knowledge of the human frame, and of the terrible ravages which rum can make upon it, might have talked eloquently about the "God-like powers of the human will," and the "tremendous force of an iron resolution." Dr. Portland, glancing furtively at the human wreck beside him, could not bring himself to utter such nonsense. Whatever it had been intended the will should do for him, poor Joe Carpenter had done what he could to make his powerless to resist temptation, and had certainly succeeded well. The doctor would not have trusted the strongest promise this weak-kneed, trembling wretch could make, long enough to expect it to last him while passing the next liquor saloon. "If he could go to a place where the sight or the smell of the stuff could not reach him," he muttered to himself, "if there

were such a place on this rum-cursed earth, why, then—but as it is”—and he drew a long, discouraged sigh.

How, then, was he to answer Joe's question? Was there really no hope for the man who had placed himself in such a cruel position? Voluntarily released his will, and his nerves, even his muscles from their duty toward him and trained them to be false? In his heart of hearts Dr. Portland believed just that. "Nothing less than a miracle could save a fellow constituted as he is, set down in the midst of temptation," he told himself resolutely; and as one who did not believe in miracles, what was he to say? Joe was waiting. The doctor coughed nervously and cleared his throat; why had he been such a fool as to get himself into this ridiculous position? Since Joe Carpenter was, by his own confession, confirmed by scientific knowledge, too far gone to exercise self-control—always supposing he had been of the calibre which ever exercises it to a very great degree, of what use to torment him with long sermons about manhood, and the like?

"My mother believed in it," he said at last, and his voice sounded unnatural even to himself; "she had utmost confidence in this miraculous power which is supposed to get hold of people; and men who have had good mothers always

believe they were about right in everything, don't they?"

"Do they?" asked Joe Carpenter, thoughtfully. "Then I ought to think such things, for my old mother was one of them kind. I believe you're right, doctor; mothers is queer; for a spell you think you know more than they do, and then you think anyhow you know about as much; and after a while you know that they know more than all creation?"

This bit of moralizing fitted in with Joe's unusual mood; he was entirely grave, and the retrospective notes in his voice had still that touch of pathos; but something had irritated the doctor.

"If you had such a mother as that you ought to be ashamed of yourself," he said in caustic tones.

"I am," said Joe, laconically. "I've been ashamed this long time, till I kind of got used to it, and expected always to be, and no help for it. But I seem to have got hold of a new idea this afternoon, somehow; I don't hardly understand how. I know there are such folks as Christians, and that the Lord looks after 'em; He did after my old mother; but looking after an old broken-down hulk like me, seems different, don't it?"

"Very different!" said the doctor with decision. Then he reined in his horses so suddenly that they almost lost their balance, adding as he did so:

“I have to stop at this house, and shall be detained for some time; you may as well go on.”

Thus unceremoniously dismissed, Joe moved slowly away, not forgetting to say:

“Thank you kindly, doctor, for the ride,” but received no answer.

“Miserable hypocrite!” said the doctor, savagely, as he strode up the sandy path leading to the house where he was due; “if I had nothing to say, I wonder why I was such a fool as to undertake to say it! I might better have let the old fellow alone.” He had not been so utterly out of conceit with himself in years.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE OF THEM IS AFRAID.

IT was later by an hour or two, and the ponies were safely housed and fed, when walking slowly down the street, head bent as in a deep study, Dr. Portland almost ran against a swiftly-moving object, halted with a dignified, "beg pardon"; then a sudden lighting up of his somber face, and a cordial, "Good afternoon; so it is you with whom I almost collided! I beg ten thousand pardons. I was deep in thought, and very stupid."

Mrs. Holmes ignored the collision, and kept her grave and troubled face.

"Doctor, I am in great anxiety," she said.

"About what?" asked the doctor in a sympathetic voice, as he turned and joined her.

"About a young woman who I think is very ill, and her friends do not realize it. She ought to have medical care, and I do not know how

to bring it to pass. Do you know Mr. George Hurst?"

"I have a speaking acquaintance with the gentleman; what of him?"

"It is his sister who is ill. Do you know who their family physician is? Could you not—would it be stepping beyond the bounds of professional etiquette if you should give him a hint that his services are needed, if only the family knew enough to send for him?"

Dr. Portland drew his lips into a curious smile: "I might possibly compass it if I knew who had the honor to be their professional adviser; but I fancy that they belong to the fortunate class who, as a rule, do without us. Why doesn't Hurst attend to the business? What is he about?"

"I do not know, I am sure; unless he is under the influence of his strange wife. Madeline has been ill for a week, and grows daily worse; she has fever constantly, and her cough is alarming; yet she has not even ordinary care. Mrs. Hurst is a woman whom I do not understand. She seems jealous of any attempt to assist her, and angry at a suggestion which is made for Madeline's comfort. I was there this morning and I could see that the poor child had grown steadily worse since yesterday; yet they let her lie there, dying slowly."

"Madeline Hurst," said the doctor, thought-

fully. "Did I meet her at your rooms one evening? Yes, I remember; a tall, dark girl with brilliant eyes, and a fierce temper; so she is ill, is she? Well, she is not the one to trifle with a cough, even in this climate. How does she happen to be your friend, Mrs. Holmes? On the general principle that the unfortunate may always claim you?"

"I have become interested in her," said Mrs. Holmes, "and fond of her. I do not think her temper is any worse, perhaps, than mine would be under like circumstances. Doctor, can you do any thing to help me? Could you not speak to Mr. Hurst?"

"Hardly," said the doctor, with a shrewd smile; "I do not think he is one who would like suggestions from me; at least, I feel quite certain his wife would not; and a man and his wife are one, you know, under some circumstances."

They had reached the Hurst home, as he spoke, and Mrs. Holmes had halted on the step to give him opportunity to finish his sentence, but he made no motion toward going on; instead, he followed her up the steps.

"Oh, I do not ring," she said, quickly, divining his intention of waiting for her to be admitted. "The door is never locked; I admit myself and go up to Madeline's room."

"That is the rôle, is it? Then shall I trouble

you to admit me in the same unceremonious way?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" said the lady, much distressed; "it would not do at all! I beg your pardon, but I am afraid it will not do for you to call. Mrs. Hurst would be offended. She would think we had interfered unwarrantably."

"What, in making a friendly call? I will be entirely non-professional, I assure you; save that I may be able to relieve your anxiety after we are away, and give an intelligent opinion to my friend Mr. Hurst, if I should chance to have the opportunity, and could convince him that I was his friend."

What could be done with a doctor who chose to be so stupid? She supposed he had visions of a neat, well-appointed sitting-room like the one in which her husband received his visits, among the bright cushions and afghans. What would he think of poor Madeline's bare attic? Above all, what would Mrs. Hurst say or do if by any chance he was admitted to a sight of it? Moreover, there was a wholesome remembrance of that lady's face and manner when she affirmed that she would not have Dr. Portland to "doctor a cat!" Certainly he was not their professional choice.

"Indeed, doctor," she began, in exceeding perplexity and embarrassment, "I am afraid it will

do only harm to attempt a call ; you do not understand the situation ; there are some things I can tell you, when I have opportunity, but now"—

“Now, if I will only go away and leave you to wrestle with the enemy,” he said, smiling ; and at that moment they were interrupted. The knob of the door on which Mrs. Holmes had cautiously kept her hand was suddenly wrested from her, and the frowzle-headed Nancy appeared, more frowzled than usual, bare-headed and with eyes dilated ; she was evidently making a blind dash for somewhere.

“Oh, Mis’ Holmes !” she gasped ; “she’s choking to death, I do believe ! and Mis’ Hurst is that scared, she don’t know what to do ; she said run for a doctor ; but I don’t know where to run, nor nothing.”

Before the sentence was finished, Mrs. Holmes had brushed past her, waiting only to say :

“Doctor, follow me,” and was half-way up the stairs.

“I am a doctor,” the gentleman paused to explain to the frightened girl, then taking three steps at a time was at the landing as soon as his guide. Once within the desolate attic, it took him but a moment to understand the situation and assume control. Mrs. Hurst, thoroughly frightened and subdued, obeyed his peremptory orders as best she could, while Nancy ran

hither and thither, in everybody's way; and Mrs. Holmes, pale and quiet, was really the one to be relied upon.

"It was a narrow escape," the doctor said gravely, an hour afterward, as he stood in the little parlor below, talking with Mr. Hurst, "five minutes more, and it would have been too late. The disease has been allowed to get a firm hold, and this attack was unusually dangerous. Yes, sir, she is a very sick girl; I can not tell you, yet, what the outcome will be; I have grave fears; in fact, to be perfectly frank, I see hardly a chance in a hundred for her."

Mrs. Hurst, not quite so subdued as when she thought herself in the presence of death, but still meek, for her, waited only until Mrs. Holmes engaged the doctor's attention with a question of importance, to ask her husband whether Johnny would not better go at once for Dr. Gower, so as to be prepared if Mad had another attack like the last. Then George Hurst arose to one of those outbursts which at rare intervals were drawn from him.

No, Johnny should not go for Dr. Gower; he would not have Dr. Gower in the house; everybody knew he was an old blunderer, and that Dr. Portland was the skilled physician of the city. Mad should have the best there was to have; he had not understood, how should he, that she was

so sick? He would not have had her disease run on in this way, without treatment, for all he was worth! It was the way his mother went; and he had always been afraid Maddie would be like her; she was all he had! "The only sister I ever had," he said, turning to Dr. Portland, and there were tears in his eyes; "there were only two of us. There isn't any thing I wouldn't do for Maddie. You think you can save her, don't you, doctor?"

"I will do my utmost," said Dr. Portland with kind gravity; "but the simple truth is, that the disease has gotten a firm and most dangerous hold. As I said, the chance is only one in a hundred."

The words sounded cruel, but the doctor knew enough of human nature to feel certain that the fierce-eyed woman who was listening, needed the plainest possible speech.

There followed days which were strange ones to look back upon; days filled with constant watching and anxiety. The Hursts were poor; there was much that they could not compass; and indeed if money had been plenty, professional nurses were not, in that little city; so the watching was divided as well as it could be, among the few who could be depended upon. Mrs. Hurst did her best; she was thoroughly frightened, and repentant of some things; she did not want her sister-in-law to die; she had not at any time

dreamed of such a possibility; she had honestly believed her illness to be trivial, and was sincere in her statements that "Mad made a fuss about trifles," and had a passion for being "coddled."

In a dull, easily-comforted way, she would actually have missed the girl, had she died; above all, she did not want her to die, with that hateful doctor's words sounding in their ears: "The truth is, the disease has been permitted to get a dangerous hold." What would people say to that?

But Mrs. Hurst was no nurse; and the sick girl so visibly shrank from her ministrations as to make it awkward for both; among those whom this family called 'friends' there were strangely few who seemed to have the ability or the inclination to come to their aid in this time of need; so the business of nursing was narrowed down to a very few, prominent among whom was Mrs. Carpenter; who, it seemed, could wash and iron day-times, and sit up nights. Mrs. Hurst would not for the world have lost caste by recognizing the woman on the street as an acquaintance, but she learned to welcome her strong, cold face with such a sense of relief as she could not have described; and replied at times, almost gratefully to her brief, cold sentence: "I'm going to stay all night; you can go to bed as quick as you please."

The other extremely important nurse was Mrs. Holmes; she gave every moment during the day

which could be spared from her husband ; and was as near rebellion as she ever came, over his peremptory refusal to allow an hour of night watching for her. The doctor sustained him obstinately in this last.

“You are right, Holmes ; she needs a keeper. She would work day and night, if she could ; and it won’t do ; I don’t want her on my hands as a patient ; not until I get rid of this one ; she is too valuable as a nurse.”

But there came a night when neither doctor nor husband could resist the summons. Indeed, the doctor himself sent for her. “She’s in such a way,” explained Nancy, whose frowzy head was hidden under an indescribable hat, “that the doctor says she’ll die of it if she don’t get quiet, and he says, says he, ‘Mis’ Holmes can quiet her if any body can ; and you tell her to make all possible speed.’ Them was his very words, and Liph Stetson, he’s waiting to go along with you ; though there ain’t no need of that, for I ain’t afraid of nothing ; but the doctor he said so ; and Liph said he’d be at the front door, waiting.”

While she talked, Mrs. Holmes was making ready.

It was a frightful scene upon which she entered a few moments later. Long afterward, when very tired and overwrought she lay down to rest and closed her eyes, there would come before her men-

tal vision a haunting picture of that room ; not the attic, as Dr. Portland's first order had been to remove his patient to a room where a fire could be had ; it was Mrs. Hurst's own chamber, and though bare of many things which the ordinary chamber is supposed to need, was a great improvement on the attic. A wide bed made up with some regard to comfort was one of the improvements ; but the hollow-eyed girl who glared at the new-comer as she opened the door, was far enough from comfort.

"Am I going to die?" she asked, as Mrs. Holmes gently closed the door, "tell me this minute ! am I going to die ? I know you will tell me the truth ; the rest all think it is smart to try and deceive me, to turn off my questions with some smooth-sounding, false words ; but I can believe what you say."

"Tell her no," said the doctor, low-voiced at the new comer's side, "tell her she is better, and that she needs only to be quiet and go to sleep in order to improve rapidly."

Mrs. Holmes fixed a pair of anxious eyes upon the speaker's face. "Doctor, is it true?" she murmured.

His face flushed and he spoke haughtily :

"At least it is necessary in order to secure quiet ; this excitement is simply suicidal. No, since you are so anxious for the truth, I have

almost no hope of her case, and she is destroying what shreds of hope there were."

"What are you two whispering about?" this from the bed, in the same high-keyed, excited voice, "I do not want any patched-up story; I thought when you came I should have the truth."

Mrs. Holmes went swiftly over and knelt by the bedside; she possessed herself of the fevered hand, and spoke in low, soothing tones:

"Madeline, I do not know; no one knows but God; we hope you are going to get well; but I can not bear it, to have you care so much. I want it to be well with you whether you live or not."

"That is impossible," said the girl, and her eyes looked larger and blacker than ever before; "I am afraid; I am awfully afraid to die. I can not die!"

Her tones kept rising, until on the last word they were almost a shriek. In vain Mrs. Holmes tried to hold the tossing hands, tried to make cool, quieting passes over the flushed forehead, tried to speak simple, earnest words of helpfulness; she could not listen, she had lost the power to control herself; she could only cry out wildly, "I cannot die; I am afraid!" The awe-stricken watchers stood helplessly around. Mrs. Hurst, frightened almost as much as was the sick girl; her husband pressing his nervous hands together in frantic dis-

gust of his impotency, and with eyes heavy with unshed tears; Mrs. Carpenter, upon whose face was a look of sullen mockery. At last the doctor came forward, his face more sternly set than Mrs. Holmes had ever seen it. "This will not do," he said decidedly, "I must give her an opiate; you are only making her worse." But the next moment he had reason to regret his words.

"I will not take an opiate," said Madeline, throwing herself to the further side of the bed. "At least I will die with what mind I have. You need not bring it; I will never swallow it."

He leaned over her and tried to speak gently:

"This will not put you to sleep; it will simply quiet your nerves; this excitement is bad for you; if you will be as quiet as possible, I am looking to see you much better in the morning."

It would seem as though it must have been difficult for Dr. Portland to forget the next words which were spoken to him. Madeline's great black eyes were leveled fully at him and she spoke slowly, evidently trying to control her fierce excitement, the better to impress him:

"You deceived me," she said; "you told me I was better — was doing nicely; and I overheard you, five minutes afterward, telling Mrs. Hurst that there was hardly a shadow of a chance for me. Do you think I will believe anything you say, after this? I wish you would go away. I

tell you I am afraid to die; none of you know anything about that, but Mrs. Holmes. She could help me if I were not already beyond help; but oh, I know I am, I tell you I know I am!" and her voice arose into a shriek again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE ASKS EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS.

IT was a fearful night. When, after hours of agony, the sufferer sank into a troubled sleep from mere exhaustion, the watchers felt, some of them, months older than when the night began. The gray dawn of another day was creeping into the room, when Dr. Portland came and spoke to Mrs. Holmes.

“You would better let me take you home; you can do nothing here, and your husband will be anxious. She will sleep, or at least lie quietly for some time now; I succeeded in getting that opiate swallowed, at last.”

He spoke coldly, as one who was simply performing a professional duty without any personality of any sort.

As it seemed to be only too true that she could do nothing, Mrs. Holmes made no objection to his suggestion.

They walked on in silence for some moments; at last she asked: "What do you think of her now, doctor? What is the outlook?"

"It is impossible to say. That she is living is a matter of surprise to me. I had supposed her too weak to endure any such strain as she put upon herself; but in reality I can not see that she is any nearer the end than she was last night; I have almost no hope of her recovery, if that is what your question means."

Mrs. Holmes drew a long, heavy sigh. Then, after another square had been made in silence, "Doctor, from your stand-point it must have seemed strange to you that I said what I did last night. I could not repeat your words, being assured from you that they were false. I simply could not take the responsibility of deceiving a soul which might in a few hours more be in the presence of God." The doctor bowed gravely. "Our standpoints are different, as you say," he replied; "I thought, as I told you, that there might be a chance for her, if we could calm that terrible excitement. I confess I fail to see what difference to you a few soothing words could have made at such a time; they would not have altered existing facts, and they might have aided in the physical struggle."

"But, Dr. Portland, they were false words! Is the truth to be toyed with at our pleasure, and

used, or not, according as in our short-sighted wisdom may seem best?"

"Even the truth should not be spoken at all times," he said, evading the question at issue in a graceful way which he had.

"I admit it; but should untruth be spoken at any time?"

The doctor was still excited, and vexed that his professional directions had been disobeyed, or he would not have been guilty of the rudeness of his next remark.

"If it had been the life of your husband which was at stake it would have dulled your careful discrimination between truth and falsehood, I imagine."

Her answer was given after a longer silence than before, and was lower toned: "Doctor Portland, you have probed deeply and found my idol; I admit it; and it is true that I do not know how strong I should be under temptation; but still I believe that I love my Savior more than I do my husband, and that He would keep me from dishonoring him, even in such an hour as that."

Then they had reached Mrs. Stetson's door, and with no other words than a gentle "good morning" she left him.

Dr. Portland went on down the street with long, angry strides, telling himself that he was a consummate idiot and a boor besides, and that he

ought to know enough by this time not to meddle with other people's whims whatever they might be.

* * * * *

They were in the stuffy little parlor which belonged to the Hurst family. Madeline, as pale as the white wrapper she wore, lay on the lounge which had been wheeled toward the window to give her a glimpse of the wonderful sunset display. A crimson afghan was thrown over the foot of the couch, the only bit of color about the girl. Standing at a little distance from the couch in such a way as to command a full view of her face, was Dr. Portland. He studied her critically, while she studied the crimson and gold outside.

"We need to plan some way to transfer a few touches of that to your face," he said, inclining his head toward the afghan, as her eyes came slowly back from the outside world. "What is the use of looking like a wilted leaf all the time? Why don't you gain strength faster? There isn't any sense in creeping along at this snail pace."

The faintest tinge of color showed for a moment on the pallor, as Madeline said slowly, "Mrs. Hurst thinks the same. She has an idea that if I but made the attempt, I could be as strong as any body. Is there truth in it, doctor?"

"I hope and believe so," said the doctor, promptly; "but you and she would better see to it that no attempts are made except under my

direction, for some time to come. I'll have a talk with Mrs. Hurst, and give her some very expressive directions. What you need to do is, to attempt to care a little more about it. At this present time, to speak frankly, you impress me as a person who has too little interest in the getting well to make the mental, not physical effort, necessary."

That faint tinge of color came again, and faded as quickly, leaving the face almost paler than before. "It is only too true," the girl said, gravely; "I do not think I have the interest in getting well that most people would. It is not strange; I am more entirely alone in the world than most girls are. And yet," she hesitated, and the gravity deepened, "it is also true," she began again after a moment, "that I am not at all ready to die. I proved that to you, that night, I think, when you all believed I was going. I have been wanting to speak to you about it. I believe I was rude. I did not know what I was saying, I think. And you have been so very kind to me that I do not want to be rude."

"That is not even to be remembered," the doctor said, briskly. "Do you not understand that physicians have learned not to attach the slightest importance to what people say when they are ill? I assure you I have never given that feature of the time a second thought, and it would be for

your advantage to dismiss that entire week from your mind as much as possible."

"But I want to think about it, doctor, if you please, and to ask some questions. Do you still think that I was so very sick?"

"You certainly were," he answered, with a smile; "I see no advantage to be gained in begging the question at this late day. I do not remember ever to have had a patient over whom I was so hopeless, who rallied so encouragingly as you have done and are doing. I think I may safely be congratulated on my success."

She did not respond to his gay smile; instead, her face was grave even to somberness. "But it is after all only for a little while," she said in intense seriousness. A shadow of anxiety clouded Dr. Portland's face.

"You are mistaken," he answered quickly, "there is no necessity for your feeling yourself doomed to invalidism; with proper care I look to see your health firmly established, so that in time you may even be strong; but the way to accomplish this is to banish all brooding thoughts and bring your resolute common-sense to bear upon the case."

"I do not mean quite what you think," she said, still gravely; "I know I am better, am getting well; and, as I told you, I do not feel so glad over it as most girls would, or I should not,

if—Dr. Portland, I did not think I should be so afraid to die. I had thought about it often, and wished that I could—even wished that it could be right to take life into my own hands and decide when it should end; when I was safe and well, and far away from death, I thought I should not be in the least afraid; but it was a different thing to come to what I thought was the very verge. I was terribly afraid.” A perceptible shudder ran through her frame at the recollection.

“That was perfectly natural,” said the doctor, very kindly. “Life is natural to the young; they ought to desire it, and to shrink from death; it was intended that it should be so.”

Madeline shook her head. “It is not a question of age, doctor. There was a woman, old and poor, who lived near our home when I was a little girl. I was in the room when she died; my mother went to watch with her, and as there was no one to stay with me, she took me with her. In the night the woman grew suddenly worse, and I heard the noise and came in; it was dreadful! She was afraid too—oh, awfully afraid! And her hair was white; she must have been seventy, or more. At her age, according to the natural way of looking at this matter, she ought to have expected death, and been prepared for it; she was anything but that! She died in mortal terror; it

was months before I could go to sleep at night without going over the scene."

"I do not wonder; it was a terrible ordeal to which to subject a child. What I wish now is, that you would put all such somber memories quite away, and make yourself grow strong."

"But there is a great difference in people," she went on, quietly, ignoring his last suggestion. "My mother was young, was not fifty when she died, and there was not a thread of gray in her beautiful hair; but she was not in the least afraid. She spoke of dying as simply as I might speak of going out into the sunshine. Oh, better than that, she was very glad to go; and I was foolish enough to imagine that when the time came for me, I should feel as she did!"

Dr. Portland seemed to have no reply ready for the next pause, and there was silence for a moment; then, Madeline, still with the look of intense sorrowful earnestness on her pale face, spoke again:

"And so, doctor, what I meant was, that there was more than a question of age involved; and I mean also that it is something which is sure to come. I am better now, it is true, but who can tell how soon or how suddenly I might be called upon to die? In any event, it is certain to come some time."

"That is true," he said with a gravity as

marked as her own; "death is the one thing of which we seem to be sure."

"And since this is so, ought not we, ought not I, to do what I can to get ready for it? If there is such a thing as meeting even death with such a smile as my mother wore, would it not be the most reasonable thing for me to find out how—I mean before the time came, so that it need not take me unawares?"

"That sounds like a common-sense view of the subject," he answered, trying to speak lightly; "but I think I would not talk about it any longer just now. You are hardly strong enough for such grave themes."

"I think I am; I think you are mistaken in me. It troubles me, haunts me; that night when I felt my breath going from me, and knew that there was a great horror of darkness for me to step into, I resolved that I would, if I ever had another chance, live differently, and get ready, if possible, to die differently; if I were only ready, Dr. Portland, I confess to you that I would be very glad to go; because I am peculiarly lonely and desolate here. I decided this morning that I would talk to you about it at the first opportunity, and get your advice as to how to begin."

"I do not think I quite comprehend your meaning," said the doctor in visible embarrassment;

speaking these words more for the purpose of gaining time than because he did not understand her.

“Why, it is like this,” she said simply; “I once thought I was a Christian. I used to pray, and to read in the Bible, and go to prayer-meeting and all those things; I thought I knew all about it, and was on the right road. But when mother died, I was miserable; rebellious, they called it, and I suppose I was; gradually I gave up all idea of such a life and felt that there was not much truth in religion, any way. It made matters worse to remember that Mrs.—that certain people whom I knew very well and did not even respect, were church members; I grew suspicious, and watchful of people who made such professions, and liked to find the inconsistencies. Gradually I lost faith in almost every one’s religion, only mother’s; you will see how absurdly inconsistent I was when I tell you that I never for a moment doubted her kind. But I told myself that I could never be like her, because our temperaments were utterly different, and that at least I would not be a hypocrite; so it is different with me from those who have always lived thoughtless lives, and never had their attention especially called to this subject. It is as though I had enlisted once, and then deliberately deserted, because I did not believe in some who were in the army; and I do



MADLINE WAITED PATIENTLY.

not seem to know the way to re-enlist. I had a feeling that you could help me."

"May I ask why?"

There was no attempt at a smile upon the doctor's face; he was both embarrassed and puzzled; no problem ever presented to him had been so difficult of solution as this. Madeline's reply was direct enough.

"Because I have noticed that you seemed to see through things so quickly; to understand half statements, and go directly to first causes. You have seemed to understand how I felt, for instance, better than I did myself; and your replies to questions are always so direct and simple; so easy to grasp and understand. That was why I thought you could tell me in a few plain words, what I need to know."

Dr. Portland walked abruptly to the window, and looked out. Madeline waited patiently; she imagined that he saw something outside, which demanded his thought. As for him, he had never felt so much like a coward in his life; had there been an imperative summons at the moment, calling him to a twenty-mile drive through the woods, he would have hailed it as a relief. He almost wished that his usually restless ponies would break away and demand immediate attention, but they stood in unusual quietness awaiting his pleasure. At last he turned:

“You have made a mistake, Miss Madeline,” he said, attempting to smile. “The matters about which I am clear, and can speak to the point, have to do with my profession; no person could be in greater fog in regard to the subject which interests you, than I am. I would be very glad to help you if I could, but it is utterly out of my power.”

She was looking earnestly at him with those intense black eyes. “Are you not a Christian, then?” she asked at last, and he detected the note of grave surprise in her voice.

“I can not lay the slightest claim to any such title.”

A moment of silence, then there came one of those long, desolate sighs, peculiar to the girl, as she said: “I beg your pardon; I find I am surprised. I think I believed that all physicians understood these things; they deal so continually with sickness and trouble, and so often come in contact with death, that it seemed natural.” She was so pale, so sad, so desolate, that he could not bring himself to be willing to go away without an attempt to help her.

“You certainly know of one person who could afford you all the help you may need,” he said, kindly. “Has not your friend Mrs. Holmes made it apparent that this subject stands first in her thoughts?”

“I know she could help me,” Madeline said, quickly, “but I do not expect her to-day; she was here yesterday, and it is a long walk, you know. I have been thinking about this all the morning, and I suppose it is because I am sick and weak, but it seemed to me that I could not wait until to-morrow; I wanted to know some things right away.”

“That at least is a common condition with sick people,” he said, smiling, and trying to speak in his usual tone of voice; “what they want, they want immediately, and as I always advocate gratifying them if possible, with your permission I will drive around and bring Mrs. Holmes to you if she is able to come.”

The grateful look he received sent him away at once; but it is safe to say that Dr. Portland never went on such a peculiar errand before.

CHAPTER XXV.

ONE, LOSES HIS IDENTITY.

“IS she worse?” was Mrs. Holmes’ instant and troubled question.

“Not at all; on the contrary, she is better to-day than I have yet found her; that is, her pulse is stronger and there is a steady improvement in all directions.”

“Then, is it any thing of importance, doctor, any thing which will not do as well to-morrow? Because I have promised to help Mrs. Stetson this afternoon with a little domestic matter, if I can, and” —

The doctor interrupted gravely: “I consider it very important that you spend the next hour with Miss Hurst, if possible; I have reason to think that in your judgment domestic matters of all sorts will sink into the background before the subject about which she wishes to consult you; and invalids must not be crossed, unless there is an imperative reason.”

“I will go at once,” said Mrs. Holmes. It was

evident that his gravity and reticence troubled her. Since he had no explanation to make, she set about studying out one for herself and presently asked a question in line with her troubled thoughts.

“Dr. Portland, do you know a Mr. Arson? And if so, what do you know of him?”

“Mr. N. S. Arson? I know him quite as well as I care to, and I know no good of him. May I ask why he is a subject of interest to you?”

“There are several reasons why,” she answered in distress. “Can you tell me what to do with a foolish child who knows almost nothing of the world, when a bad man deliberately sets out to deceive her, and gains such an influence that she will believe his word rather than your own?”

“Mrs. Holmes, you can not be speaking of that scoundrel in connection with Madeline Hurst!”

“No, I am not speaking of Madeline Hurst,” Mrs. Holmes said quickly, but with heightened color; she felt that there were complications between those two which justified her in thinking anxiously about them, but she had no right to speak.

“I beg your pardon,” said the doctor in his usual tone; “I was surprised into asking questions which do not concern me. As to your query, it is not an easy one to answer; though I think if the motive for doing so was imperative, I

could convince any girl who had common-sense enough to make it worth while to try to save her, that Mr. Arson is an utterly rotten hearted young man."

"I must talk with you further," said Mrs. Holmes anxiously; "I may need your help, though I hardly know how to secure you a chance to give it."

By this time they were in front of the Hurst home again, and Dr. Portland was giving his companion a parting charge after this fashion: "I look to you to see that my patient is not overstrained in any direction to-day. She is morbid and needs soothing; remember that cheerfulness, and a removal as far as possible, of all sources of disquietude are very important in her case."

Mrs. Hurst was looking out of her dining-room window; her sewing woman, Miss Pauline Skimpson, being seated at the sewing machine near her. That young woman stayed the rattle of the machine to hear her employer's remarks. "Here he comes again! and Mrs. Holmes with him; I knew he would find some excuse for having a visit with her. The way those two go on, making a cat's-paw of Mad to do it, is a sight to behold! Not a day passes but they meet here, or on the street, or somewhere, and go sauntering off together; or else he takes her riding. I think it is simply disgraceful!"

“Is she a widow?” questioned Miss Skimpson, straining her eyes to get a better view.

“A widow! No; but I suppose she thinks she will be, before long. I’d try to have decency enough to wait until my husband was buried, at least! He’s got consumption, they say, and she leaves him to take care of himself the best way he can, and gallivants off with Dr. Portland. Lovely associates they are for Mad! They go on about her in a way to make one sick, just for the sake of having a meeting-place. Mad thinks they are angels, of course; girls of her stamp are always fools, and don’t know when they are being used simply as blinds. I tell Mr. Hurst that I have had about enough of it. We are used to being decent, if we haven’t as much money as some.”

You are not to suppose, from this, and certain other exhibitions of character, that Mrs. Hurst was the embodiment of all evil. On the contrary she had some admirable qualities. In the church to which she belonged she was considered in her line a most estimable woman; nobody could work harder than she, in getting up church fairs, suppers, sociables and what not? Even scrubbing, and that which seems to some women more hateful work still—dish-washing, could be heroically accomplished by this small woman whenever it was for the benefit of the church; and as for cake, she was simply in her element when managing

that. It was said of her by one enthusiastic young woman that she could make an angel cake which was "perfectly heavenly." And a sullen, sour-visaged man who had come into unpleasant contact with her, was heard to remark that it must be because she was a fallen angel, and had lost all traces of the angelic, save that which had to do with cake! Nevertheless, as I say, Mrs. Hurst had her circle of friends, and was in some respects a well-meaning woman. That she did not like to work at home, that she did eagerly long to keep up appearances in society beyond her means, that she took unreasoning and violent prejudices against certain persons, and could see no good in any thing they might say or do, and that she was painfully careless in the use of her tongue, were faults which those who knew her well, sneered at, or sighed over, according to their several dispositions. Very often there was no "malice aforethought" in her careless words. For instance, she had by no means planned to make the astounding statements against Mrs. Holmes and Dr. Portland which I have repeated. She simply disliked them both; chiefly because she fancied that they held themselves above her, and chose to patronize her sister-in-law. The sight of them together suggested the thought that she had seen them often together at her house, and although no one knew better than

she, the occasion which had called them, and the imperative need for their presence, given such a woman as Mrs. Hurst, and the inference she imagined herself drawing, was to be expected. Perhaps it was well for her that not one of the persons interested suspected for a moment that such thoughts were being evolved. Even Madeline, who knew her brother's wife well, or thought she did, had no conception of such a train of thought as this.

Dr. Portland having left his charge, drove to the stables where his horses were kept and left them. He had other calls to make, but they were not imperative, and for some reason which he could not have defined, he felt that the solitude of his own room was necessary to him for a time. He seemed to himself to have received a shock which somehow disturbed the foundations of his unbelief, if those terms may be used together. Down deep in his heart were other questions, also taking vague form and apparently trying to reach the surface and disturb him. He dimly felt that some time, perhaps in the near future, there were matters which he must squarely face and settle. To-day he wanted rather to get away from them, and could not trust himself to drive along the quiet roads and think. He would read, he would study, he would write; in some way, for a time at least he would get rid of him-

self. He did none of the things thus planned. Seated in the outer office waiting for him was a middle-aged man, clean shaven, decently dressed, with his gray hair combed carefully back, revealing a forehead which suggested a different type of face from what those who had seen him when the unkempt hair lay heavy upon it, had imagined. He arose respectfully on the doctor's entrance, and waited, while that gentleman bowed as to a stranger, and stared, and at last spoke.

"Joe, upon my word! At first I did not know you. Why, man, if a clean shave and a clean collar make such a difference to everybody, I wonder why in the name of sense haven't you tried such simple experiments before? People who do not observe closely would never dream that you were old Joe Carpenter."

The old man shook his head with a grave smile on his face.

"I ain't," he said simply. "They'd be right; I ain't old Joe Carpenter any more. That is, I ain't and I am. I don't understand it any more than you do; and as for being surprised you can't begin to have as much of that feeling as I have. Wait till you've lived with yourself for nigh on to fifty years, and been well acquainted all that time, and suddenly find out that while you've got the same hair and eyes and all them things left, the part that is you yourself, and has been for as long

as you can remember, is gone! Then you'll know what it means to be astonished."

There was not the slightest attempt at fun in Joe's manner; on the contrary, he was perfectly grave and thoughtful. It was evident that he had passed through some experience which had astonished and bewildered himself. The doctor waited curiously, extremely uncertain what to say next, and old Joe after a moment's silence continued respectfully: "I ask your pardon, doctor, for waiting here for you; I ain't no errand—that is, nobody is sick; but I felt as though I wanted to tell you that you was right, exactly right. It all come to pass, and more! It is a great deal more than you made me understand, though I suppose that is because I was dumb, and you likely knew what you were talking about."

"Sit down," said Dr. Portland, "and explain your riddle. I am the one who is dumb now; I don't in the least know what you are talking about. Have you been mesmerized, or what is the matter?"

"I don't exactly know the name to call it by, doctor, and I don't know as I ever could explain it, anyhow; it is enough for me to feel it; but I allowed that you would understand. You told me, you remember, about that Power which could get hold of even a poor shack like me, and make me over, so that the things I hankered after once,

I wouldn't even want. That wasn't your way of putting it, you know, but I figured that out of it; especially when you reminded me of my mother, and the way she used to talk and think. It got hold of me that day like something I hadn't heard since mother used to pray, in the old kitchen, with me kneeling down just across from her and wishing she would get through. She's been long gone, doctor, but I kind of felt that day, as though she hadn't got through yet; as though them prayers was following me, and saying over to me what you had just said! Well, I can't tell it, only I've proved it, doctor, and it holds good. He got hold of me; I don't know how; I don't know how He came to think it was worth while, but He just took and did it, and here I am!"

The look of half-amused half-amazed incredulity upon the doctor's face would have made a study for an artist. "So I perceive," he said in response to Joe's last words; "but the question is, what do you mean? Am I to understand that you have reformed—given up drinking?"

"It has given me up," said Joe with infinite gravity. "I didn't do it; I could no more give it up than I could lay down this arm of mine on your table and go off and leave it here. I tried that time and again, just as I told you; but when He got a hold of me it was another thing! Don't

ask me to explain it, because I can't do it; I don't know nothing about the way, or the how, or any of them things; all I know is that I went home that evening after you took me the ride, and I went out to the shed where we keep our wood and things, and I got down on my knees, and says I: "Here I be, Lord; I don't know how to pray; I didn't learn how when mother wanted me to, down in her kitchen nigh onto forty years ago; and I'm a drunkard; they've called me that for maybe a dozen years now; I never let on that I know it, but I do; and I can't stop drinking, any more than I can fly over the steeple; I've tried it oftener than any of 'em think, and I know; and I've heard them that knows, say so. 'It is a physical impossibility for that fellow to stop,' says old Dr. Parsons, once; 'he's diseased his will-power so that he can't do it.' I heard him speak them very words, and I believe them, because I've tried it; but says I, here's another doctor who has been talking to me to-day, and he believes the same thing, but he believes something else, and so did his mother, and so did mine; he believes that you've got a kind of a power by which you can get a hold of worthless shacks like me, and turn us around so that we will hate the things we like now. Says I, 'if I could hate whiskey, there'd be some hope of me maybe; but I don't and I can't. Now if you will

take a hold of this and help me out, there ain't any thing I wouldn't be willing to do the rest of my life to show how grateful I be.' That was about it, doctor, something like that, you know. Well, sir, He did it! Don't ask me how. Things wasn't any different that night, so far as I know. I stayed around the house a spell, and got some supper and went to bed early; I had no kind of a notion of any thing having happened. I didn't say a word to Mis' Carpenter about not drinking any more; I'd told her so a hundred times, and she didn't believe it, and I didn't blame her a mite for it, either. It wasn't possible, you see, for anybody to believe it, the facts contradicted it; well, all I knew this time was, that I meant to do my share; it is an everlasting little mean share, says I to myself, and it don't amount to shucks so far as I am concerned, for I've tried it; but maybe it will amount to something with Him; because, if he knows everything, He knows what a worthless old hulk, and 'physical impossibility' I am; and perhaps all that he asks is my miserable little best and not somebody else's that hasn't spoiled their chance. And I stuck to that notion. It was there when I woke up in the morning, and it went off down street with me, past eleven saloons; yes, sir, past 'em, and I had a nickel in my pocket too! It wa'n't will, because all the will I had was to do my sneaking little

best, and I knew what that would amount to if it was left to itself; but it wasn't left!"

No description on paper will give you an idea of Joe's impressiveness as he reached this point in his story.

"No, sir, it wasn't left! I hadn't any hankering after them eleven saloons! I don't know why! I don't understand it; He does, and I'm thankful enough to let Him manage; and I just come in to tell you you were right, and no mistake."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ONE "RE-ENLISTS."

WHAT possible reply was there for a man like Dr. Portland to make? That the Joe Carpenter who sat before him was entirely unlike any Joe Carpenter of his previous acquaintance was evident. That the mere letting alone of intoxicating liquors for the space of three weeks could work such a change seemed improbable; that there was a mysterious change possible to human beings which the superstitious called "conversion," this doctor did not believe; that Joe Carpenter had force of will enough to carry him through such a physical crisis as would be necessary to him in attempting to give up the use of liquors, he also did not believe. I hope you see where his logic carried him. In order to adhere to his preconceived notions, was it going to be necessary to deny the evidence of his eyes and ears?

"So you think, Joe, that the struggle is over, and that you can go where you please and do

what you please and be all right, now that some mysterious power has gotten hold of you. Is that it?"

Joe looked gravely surprised, and somewhat disappointed.

"Why, no," he said, "that ain't it at all; I told you I couldn't explain, though being you started me, I thought maybe you would understand. I promised, you see, to do my weak little best; and my best of course will be to keep out of the way of 'em, and let 'em alone if I can. The trouble has always been, before, that I couldn't; not that I didn't mean to; and I don't know what He did to me to make me able to do it, but now I can; or He can, it ain't me; it is something that has got hold of me and ain't going to let go again; that's what I believe. You understand it, don't you? You are one of them kind, ain't you?"

It is impossible to convey to you the depth of wistfulness in Joe's voice. Dr. Portland actually winced under it; for the second time that day must he disappoint a friend by owing to the poverty of his own nature?

Joe was waiting anxiously for his answer; and with those earnest eyes looking into his, he could not decide how to evade the question.

"What 'kind' do you mean?" he asked with a half laugh; "I have not a very well-defined knowledge of my own beliefs, I am afraid."

Joe was not to be so easily turned aside from his purpose. "I mean one of the kind that my mother was, and your mother; and that woman you told me about at Stetson's. You belong to 'em, don't you?"

"I can not lay claim to the sort of relationship which you demand, Joe; though there is a sense in which I trust I belong to them."

"Well, now, I am beat!" declared Joe, perplexed and grave. "You see after I come to know that the thing was true, I says to myself, 'scholars and them kind have known this all the while, and have lived by it; it is only poor fools like old Joe the drunkard that have thrown away such splendid chances.' And I thought sure you was one of 'em. Why, how come you to start me, if you ain't?"

Dr. Portland's advantages as a Bible student in his youth had been good; there were verses which often trooped about him, arresting his thought whether he would or not; for the moment it was as if he were back in the old weather-beaten school-house where the Sabbath School of his childhood gathered, and saw himself rattling glibly off to the great comfort of his teacher, this verse among others: "Lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

"Have you told any one of this experience?"

asked the doctor, ignoring the question, and looking curiously at his guest, as he wondered how others accounted for the strange change in him.

“Not yet, doctor—only Mis’ Carpenter, of course; and she don’t believe in it; I don’t blame her a mite; she’s had experience with me, you see. But the way to do is to tell it, I know that. There’s a prayer-meeting at the church to-night, and I’ve about made up my mind to go. I dunno as I shall say anything, I dunno as it would be proper; what do you think?” He stopped and eyed his listener anxiously. The doctor laughed; this interview certainly had the ludicrous side.

“I do not know, I am sure,” he said, “I am not posted in regard to such matters; but I should imagine that a prayer-meeting would be an exceedingly proper place for such a story as you have been telling me.”

“Oh, I won’t say all that!” said Joe, hastily, “I couldn’t, you know; standing up, and different folks listening! But I thought maybe I ought to stand up, and say ‘the Lord has found me,’ or something like that. I remember they used to have such meetings when I was a boy and men and women and children talked; do they do that way now?”

“I am not a competent witness, remember; still I have the impression that it is considered proper for people who have such messages, to

give them ; I would by all means do so, if I were you ; it strikes me that it is a surprising story."

"Isn't it, now?" said Joe, eagerly, "to think of such a thing coming to me, old Joe Carpenter the drunkard! I don't wonder at your being surprised; you can't be more so than I am."

Dr. Portland's surprise was increasing every minute. Altogether the day was a marked one in his life. To be interviewed twice in one day, upon a subject of which he was perfectly ignorant, and to have to admit his ignorance, to the astonishment and pain of both questioners, was certainly a strange experience.

As he walked slowly toward his boarding house, thinking it all over, the conversation which had been held some weeks before in Mrs. Holmes' rooms, returned to him. He had himself declared that Mrs. Holmes would have to get hold of old Joe and reform him, in order to save his wife. He remembered with what gravity both Mrs. Holmes and her husband had received this attempt at a joke, and how sure they seemed to be that such an absurdity was possible; and here it was, apparently accomplished! An amazing feature of the miracle was, that he seemed to have "begun it," as Joe said.

What a thing it would be to see the old man in that prayer-meeting! Certainly there would be a sensation when they saw him, even though he

said not a word. "Mrs. Holmes ought to be present," the doctor told himself, "it would be too bad to have her lose the first sight." He knew that she did not attend the evening meetings; at first she had been unable to leave her husband, and now that he was rapidly convalescing there was no one to accompany her. "She ought to go to-night," declared the doctor, "what if I should complete the day's wonders and take her down? Joe and I together in a prayer-meeting ought to afford excitement enough to keep this town in a whirl for the next six weeks! I'll offer, at least; and I'll not give her the real reason for my disinterestedness, either; I want to see her face during the first surprise; she can not have heard of Joe's transformation or she would have mentioned it."

The more he thought about it, the more fascinated he became with his scheme, and the hour appointed for prayer-meeting found him really pressing his services upon Mrs. Holmes.

"I will take you down with pleasure if you would like to go, the evening is charming for a walk; besides, I don't mind telling you that I know of something going on there to-night which will interest you greatly."

"I do not doubt that," Mrs. Holmes said with a quiet smile; "it is a long time since I have attended a prayer-meeting where there was not that going on which interested me greatly."

“Ah! but I mean something special; urge her to go, Holmes, it will do her good; she will regret it afterward if she is not there to-night.”

“I will go,” said Mrs. Holmes, “I do not need urging. Thank you for the opportunity; I was trying to plan, this morning, to secure an escort. I thought of Liph and Happy, but not once of you, doctor.”

“Shows how my disinterested efforts at partnership are appreciated,” said the doctor, good-humoredly; he was not prepared for her reply.

“I do appreciate you, doctor; I can hardly tell you how much I thank you for coming for me this afternoon. I would not for a great deal have missed the opportunity of seeing and helping Madeline just at the important moment of her life. Do you know it marked a crisis with her more important than the one she passed that night when we both watched over her?”

“I knew that she was very nervous, and that she and I both thought you might be able to soothe her.”

Mrs. Holmes smiled. “She has discovered a better Helper than I,” she said, “One who will see to it that she is soothed by His own strong and tender power hereafter, I trust and believe. Poor Madeline has been wandering over weary places for years, and has but just reached home.”

Dr. Portland was silent; so much of the talk during this strange day, had been upon things which he could not understand! During the walk to church he took the lead in conversation, taking care to hold his companion closely to topics upon which he could lead. She seemed surprised that he did not make a movement to leave her at the church door.

“Are you going in?” she asked.

“Why, certainly; you did not suppose that I intended you to walk home alone, I trust? I confess that I am on strange ground, but I will endeavor to conduct myself with becoming decorum.”

It was a pleasant room; too large it is true, to suggest any idea of a family gathering, but that is a fault which must be endured wherever the main audience room of a good-sized church serves also as the gathering-place for the mid-week prayer-meeting. A goodly number of people were present, and to Mrs. Holmes the service was restful and refreshing. She was so entirely a stranger as to be unaware of the special interest which herself and her companion and one other person were creating. The quiet figure of a decently-dressed, middle-aged man sitting in an obscure corner near one of the doors failed to attract her attention; it was only when, in one of the pauses of the meeting, he arose and began

to speak, that she became aware of something quite out of the usual order of exercises.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “and ladies, too, I don’t know how to talk in a meeting, but yet I feel that I want to tell you something. You have been talking here to-night about Jesus, the Saviour, and I do certainly know Him; He found me out and spoke a word of power to me three weeks ago; I feel in my heart it will last forever; and I can’t help feeling that I ought to get up and tell these friends about it. It is a great thing to be able to save any body so low down as old Joe Carpenter the drunkard, and that is what He has done! I don’t know how to work for Him, but I want to learn, and I want to ask you all to show me how.”

Some minutes before Joe sat down, Mrs. Holmes, whose face had at first expressed only keen interest and sympathy, changed to bewilderment, and her eyes finally sought the doctor with such an eager question in them that he could but smile and silently incline his head; then he, too, felt a swift rush of color in his face, over Joe’s next words:

“And people, there’s one other thing I want to say; him that set me on the track is here to-night. He is a doctor for souls as well as bodies.”

“You are indeed a partner,” said Mrs. Holmes,

the minute this wonderful meeting was concluded, and she held out her hand to Dr. Portland with a glad light in her eyes.

"I am a hypocrite per force," he said, with an embarrassed laugh; "poor Joe is mixed, in more ways than one."

"Oh, Joe Carpenter!" she said. "Isn't it wonderful!"

Evidently Joe thought it was; he looked about him in puzzled wonder as men and women gathered around him, holding out their hands, and grasping his with a warmth which was as new to him as it was pleasant.

"I've never had no friends," he said, humbly, "not of the kind to call friends, you know, and that ain't strange, for I ain't deserved 'em; but it seems dreadful nice to have them!"

* * * * *

Life made great strides with Mrs. Holmes during the next few weeks; she had been plunged into the center of eager, absorbing work; instead of sitting as she had planned, with folded hands waiting for the winter to pass.

Madeline Hurst had been "re-enlisted," as she termed it. "I was a deserter," she said, "and deserved only punishment; but I have a wonderful Saviour."

The girl was no passive Christian; she brought to her new life all the force of her intense nature.

“I have done a great deal of harm,” she said to Mrs. Holmes; “I wish I might undo some of it.”

She gained rapidly in health and strength from the day that her decision was made. Dr. Portland looked on at the change, with the air of one who was gratified, but puzzled. Other changes as marked in their way as hers, were in progress. Mrs. Holmes had not been surprised over Madeline’s decision; she had prayed for it, worked for it, looked for it to come; but Hepzibah Smithers was another person! Yes, she had prayed for her earnestly, and had done what she could to further her own prayers; but she discovered that her faith had only been equal to hoping that some time, after long and patient effort and teaching, the girl might understand enough to lay hold upon eternal life. That she would actually grasp at the thought conveyed in that first marked verse, and hold on to it and deliberately make the decision on which her eternal future hung, was entirely beyond the reach of this woman’s hopes. Yet, as the days went by, it became increasingly evident that a marvelous change had come to Happy. Everybody in the house noticed and commented on it, after their various fashions. Not that it made itself apparent in words; instead, Happy was quieter than she had ever been; perhaps its most marked exhibition was her evident painstaking care for the comfort of

others; her earnest solicitude to do every thing which came within her line of work, as carefully and as swiftly as she could.

“I have to wash out the dish-towels now,” she said to Mrs. Holmes, one day with a smile, “I used to hate to do it, and I got rid of it whenever I could; and Mis’ Stetson said they wasn’t fit to handle with the tongs; but now I have to make them as clean as soap-suds and water will do it, because I’m doing it for the ‘glory of God.’ Ain’t that queer, though, that I can do such work for Him! I didn’t believe it when you first told me, but it is true; and another thing, Mis’ Holmes, I used to think it wasn’t worth while to be so dreadful particular, but I kind of like to be, now; I like clean things, and I like to rub ’em, and make ’em clean.”

Was even this a homely illustration of the law that “human beings grow like the object which they worship”? Was Happy learning to like purity, even in material things, because she had caught a glimpse of infinite purity?

Certainly Happy was becoming a blessing in the Stetson boarding-house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THEY ARE LED BY UNSEEN PATHS.

THERE came another joyous surprise to Mrs. Holmes. She was called to the parlor one day to see a "nice-looking young fellow"; this was Happy's description of him.

At the first moment she did not recognize him, and he, on his part seemed lost in amazement and stood staring at her; but his face broke into a smile as at last she exclaimed, "Why, it is Joe Trueman!"

"Yes," he said, "and you are Miss Chrissy — or, no, I beg your pardon, you are Mrs. Holmes, aren't you? They told me it was a Mrs. Holmes, but I never thought of its being you! I did not know you were in this part of the world."

At last, after a long, eager talk about old friends, Joe came back to business. He was living in Markham, and they had organized a Christian Endeavor Society, and felt that the first important work to be done was to have a Reading

Room. The trouble had been in securing a room; there was only one building suitable, and that, though closed and idle, had been leased by a Mrs. Holmes for six months. Part of Joe's errand to this city was to look up Mrs. Holmes and see if he could sub-lease the room of her for their use. Here, then, was her "bread" which had been "cast upon the waters" but a little while before! Only she had not called it bread, but wasted effort. That "giggling club" which had so haunted her had been caught at last; some of its leading members, she found by eager questioning, were ready and willing to become active members in the new society.

"They told me they had heard about it," said Joe, "and that Mrs. Holmes had been anxious to organize one, and that they were ashamed of themselves. But we have had a revival, and things are very different, I think, from what they were when you were there; any way, we have nine young people who are in earnest; and we are going to try what we can do."

"Well," said Mrs. Holmes, "I will give you the pretty curtains I made for the room. It went to my heart to dismantle it and carry them away. How glad I am that I got it all ready for you, Joe! But I had not the slightest hope it would ever be used for such a purpose."

"Isn't it strange," she said to Stuart, after

describing the visitor and his errand; "father's office boy at work down here, and transforming that giggling club into a Christian Endeavor Society! Who would have supposed that such a thing could happen! And our room will be used, after all, for the purpose to which we dedicated it. Life is full of fascinations, Stuart."

They went one afternoon, she and Stuart, to call on the Carpenters; it was her husband's first call. The room was as neat as ever, and Mrs. Carpenter looked not a whit less grim; but the man who sat in neat dress by the open window trying to read, in the fading light, was as unlike as possible to the creature who had lounged in with his pipe, on Mrs. Holmes' first visit.

He welcomed his callers with the air of a gentleman.

"I was trying to make out the verses we are to talk about in meeting to-night," he explained. "I've just come in from my work, and was looking them over and thinking about them a bit."

"Oh, yes" — in answer to Mr. Holmes' question; "I've got steady work, and plenty of it. I used to be a good workman, folks said, and I'm getting back my skill a bit, I think. You find us in poor quarters, sir, and that is my fault and nobody's else; but we'll get into a better place soon. I think by the time our month is up here, we can move. Mis' Carpenter don't believe

that," he said wistfully, following her with his eyes, as her face broke into that mocking smile which Mrs. Holmes knew so well. She was folding clothes and placing them neatly in a basket; when she had finished, she unceremoniously left the room.

Her husband's gaze followed her, still with that wistful look.

"I don't blame her a mite," he said, "it ain't strange that she thinks I won't hold out; I never have, you see, and she doesn't know Him, and can't be expected to understand how different it is. If she only knew Him, Mr. Holmes, I might be able to make her happy yet."

"She will come to know Him, brother," said Mr. Holmes, confidently, "the Lord will let you reflect His image to such a degree that she can not help but know Him. I believe that is to be your work."

Then Joe Carpenter's face became radiant.

"Do you think so?" he asked. "God bless you for saying it. I believe I pray that prayer every blessed waking minute; that, and the prayer for the doctor. He started me, Mr. Holmes, and I can't have him left out."

"Isn't it disappointing," said Mr. Holmes as they went down the walk together, "that he can not have a wife now who would be a help to him?"

“Do you think it will be possible for him to win her?” his wife asked; “you see the trouble is she never loved him; if she had, her joy now would be almost too great; but as it is” —

“It is a sad case,” said Mr. Holmes, “a solemn comment on the sin of making a marriage for any reason save the sacred one which God intended. But I can not feel that her life, though she has herself imperiled it, will be allowed to be all wasted. ‘God is very good,’ as Madeline is fond of saying.”

“Did you notice how neat every thing looked?” asked Mrs. Holmes. “Stuart, that scheme of which you and I were talking a few weeks ago, would be just the place for Mrs. Carpenter. What a comfort she would be in it! She has a genius for housekeeping; and think how rapidly Happy would learn under such tuition as she could give!”

“And think how unhappy Mrs. Stetson would be without Happy, my dear.”

“I know it,” she said, “it cannot be done, of course, because we must not desert poor Mrs. Stetson; though I do not think she will ever know how to manage a boarding-house; but she must live, and we must help her. And we could not leave poor Liph, either. Oh, Stuart, what is going to reach Liph! I am afraid he grows daily worse.”

"I do not know," he said with infinite gravity, "but I have a feeling that something or somebody will. Liph has been my burden even since I first saw him. I have not been directed to give him up; I am not willing to do so."

"I know such a pleasant house for the experiment," Mrs. Holmes said, returning to the subject after a moment's silence; "it is down on Seventh Street in a central location; a large, old-fashioned rambling house which could be made so pleasant and home-like. How charmingly Madeline and I could arrange the rooms! She has very nice taste, and she would be happy in such a place. But we must not talk of it, nor think of it, on account of Mrs. Stetson. It would break her heart, I am afraid. Poor Madeline!" The sentence closed with a sigh, as sentences referring to Madeline were apt to do. Life was by no means rose-color to that young woman. Her sister-in-law, relieved from the terror which had been upon her over the apparent approach of death, and provoked by the daily increasing intimacy between Madeline and Mrs. Holmes, an intimacy in which she almost of necessity had no share, was doing what she could to plant thorns in the girl's pathway, and succeeding only too well. The very self-control which Madeline struggled for seemed at times to add to Mrs. Hurst's vexation; and as the former had by no means attained perfection, the

occasions were frequent in which the self-control was utterly lost and she spoke words which sent her afterward to her room in a perfect abandon of shame and grief. As the days passed, an added source of trouble was laid before the tried girl. Mrs. Hurst's watchful eyes discovered that Mr. Arson came no more to the house; that he had, in fact, made but one call since Madeline was pronounced well, although his attentions during her illness had been marked.

"I just believe he is offended," Mrs. Hurst complained to her husband; "I don't wonder, I am sure. The way that doctor runs here is a disgrace to us as a family. What could Mr. Arson think but that he came to see Mad? Of course he can not be expected to know that the fellow is running after a married woman and only using Mad as an excuse."

"I don't suppose there is any great disgrace in having a man like Dr. Portland call on a young woman," Mr. Hurst would reply doggedly. "I don't know why Nick Arson need think himself injured by such a thing."

"Yes, there would be disgrace; men like Dr. Portland don't keep company with a poor girl like Mad, except to amuse themselves for a little while."

"Look here," said Mr. Hurst, his brows darkening, "seems to me you forget who you are talk-

ing about. I don't know but my sister is as good as the best of them."

"Oh, now, don't be a simpleton! Of course she is good enough, but you know as well as I do how people look at such things; she is nothing but a poor girl, with no prospects, and in poor health at that; a man like Dr. Portland isn't going to be such a fool as to notice her; for that matter he hasn't thought of such a thing; he is too much absorbed in playing his game with that Holmes woman; but I don't feel so sure of Mad, and if she loses Nick Arson by carrying on a one-sided flirtation with the doctor, I think it will be too bad! Nick will be a rich man one of these days, and he seems to be in real earnest; he was very attentive when she was sick. I should think you would talk to Mad and bring her to reason."

George Hurst was in no mood to interfere, and said so, plainly; whereupon Mrs. Hurst decided to interfere herself, and was overwhelmed with the result. Madeline made no attempt to soften the fact that she had broken entirely and forever with Mr. Arson; and, being angrily cross-questioned, was obliged to admit that very plain words had passed between them; he had "even asked her to marry him!" as Mrs. Hurst put it, in high-keyed, indignant tones, and had been refused! She did not know what excuse Mad could have for her insulting behavior; flirting with a man

for six months, leading him on in every possible way, then turning the cold shoulder to him all at once. Upon this point Madeline was reserved; she had strong reasons, certainly, but some of them she knew, only too well, her questioner would not appreciate, and others of them it was perhaps due to Mr. Arson that she be silent about. Still, of course, some answer must be given, and the quiet one, that she had not for Mr. Arson the feeling which would alone make marriage possible, only called forth a sneer.

“It is a pity you could not have found it out before! I suppose you are so struck with that idiot of a doctor that you can not think about any one else. I declare I did not know even you could be such a fool!”

After that, Madeline fled from the room, unable to trust herself longer.

This is but a hint of the trials she was called upon to endure, because of Mrs. Hurst's industrious tongue. The next outburst was caused by the discovery that Liph Stetson walked home with Madeline one evening, and that she lingered long at the door talking with him. Poor Liph was one of the persons whom Madeline longed to help. “He seems almost as friendless as I was myself,” she said to Mrs. Holmes, with a significant smile; “if I could only help him to find the One who has taken hold of me!”

She found Liph more ready to listen than she had supposed he would be, and the time seemed shorter to her than it did to Mrs. Hurst, who was waiting in a fever of indignation for her coming.

"A pretty time of night for a sick girl!" she said; "it struck ten half an hour ago."

"Poh!" said her husband, "it is not ten minutes since the clock struck. What is the use in bothering over Mad all the time as though she wasn't old enough to take care of herself?"

"Old enough! Some people never get old enough to have any sense. Do you call it decency for her to hang around the front door with a loafer like Liph Stetson? That was the one she has been talking to this half hour; I can see him as plain as day, in the moonlight; that is just like Mad, wild after the boys, if she can't get those of her station, she will take up with a street rough."

"That is all stuff," said Mr. Hurst, irritably, "Liph Stetson is nothing but a boy; and as for being a street rough, I never heard of his doing any harm to anybody but himself."

Nevertheless Mrs. Hurst repeated her charges to Madeline the next morning, ringing the changes on the unfortunate occurrence of the night before, until the girl lost every vestige of her newly-acquired self-control, and after saying many words which would have been better left unsaid, fled to

her room in such a passion, first of rage, and then of remorse, that it took hours to recover from its effects.

Mrs. Holmes had many troubled thoughts about her; and between times, had much worrying to do on Happy's account. Mr. Arson, foiled in one direction, apparently resolved to do all the mischief he could in another, and was fairly turning the girl's head with his attentions. In her perplexity, Mrs. Holmes finally sought counsel with Dr. Portland.

"You said you thought you could convince a girl who was worth convincing, of the worthlessness of Mr. Arson's character. I do not know whether you will be willing to include my poor little Happy in such a list, though she is an honest, good-intentioned girl, and Jesus Christ will be able to make her fit for His presence some day; but in the meantime she is in peril. Mr. Arson is doing what he can to deceive her; of course his sole motive is amusement, but that she can not be expected to understand. Is there anything we can do?"

"Yes," he said with darkening face; "I can do something, and will. I will say that to the fellow to-morrow, which will prevent him, I think, from troubling your protegés further. I am sorry I had forgotten about it; I meant to inquire as to your wishes, when you spoke of it before, but other

matters drew my thoughts away. I wish I could so easily see my way toward helping another friend of yours, Mrs. Holmes. I mean Miss Hurst," he added, as she waited inquiringly; "do you realize, I wonder, what a life she leads with that woman?"

"I know something of it," Mrs. Holmes said, "and imagine more; poor child! I think of her a great deal and wonder how I can help; I do not see my way clear as yet; if it were spring, perhaps—and yet I do not know—if it were not for Mrs. Stetson, but"—then she stopped, and laughed over the half statements she had been making, which really told nothing. It was annoying to her to see how her thoughts would return to a large, rambling old-fashioned house, where a happy family might be gathered, if only—and that was as far as her plans could reach.

"I consider myself blocked," she said to her husband, laughing. "That persists in looking like the next step to take, and yet we cannot take it. We could not leave poor Mrs. Stetson now; and if we could, we should lose all chance of benefiting poor Liph; still, we are not doing him any good; I wonder if there is nothing that will reach him?" For "poor Liph" persisted in making steady headway on the downward road during those days of better things for some.

They talked it over, and shook their heads, and

wondered what could be done, and declared in their wisdom that there was really nothing to be done, and all the while the chief Shepherd was looking out for His stray sheep, and planning the call which should win him homeward. It came in a most unexpected way, as so many calls do come, by the door of suffering. To the dwellers in Mrs. Stetson's home it looked like dire calamity and nothing else, when there came a morning in which she did not appear in the kitchen, and it was announced that she was sick. Not sick enough, apparently, to rouse anxiety, but simply to bring more discomfort than usual. Mrs. Holmes came bravely to the rescue, with such success, so far as the table was concerned, that several of the boarders hinted among themselves that the landlady's illness was a blessing in disguise. But this was only temporary comfort, of course; before the next nightfall it became necessary to hold a council as to what could be done. Mrs. Stetson was not better, but rather worse. "She is simply worn out," Mrs. Holmes said, "she needs a long rest, and I cannot plan how she is to get it."

"There is one way which must not be planned," her husband answered with decision. "Whatever may be said of your ability, you certainly haven't the required strength to conduct a boarding-house; you were quite worn out last night."

“But Stuart, what can be done? If her boarders leave her and find other places, the poor woman’s means of support will be gone. We must manage in some way so as not to allow that. Oh! I wonder if somebody could not induce Mrs. Carpenter to come to the rescue for a few days? It would be no harder than washing and ironing; and her husband could take his meals here.”

“You are a genius,” said Mr. Holmes, smiling. “I will myself undertake to bring that to pass. I will call upon the lady this morning; that will be a good limit for my morning walk.”

It came to pass that this plan worked to a charm; what Mrs. Holmes or Dr. Portland would probably have been coldly denied, Mr. Holmes’ talent for managing people accomplished so swiftly, that before noon of the third day, Mrs. Carpenter was making swift moves through the Stetson kitchen, the like of which Happy had never seen before.

For two days more there was something like comfort in the house; then another want made itself manifest. Mrs. Stetson, who had bitterly deprecated the trouble she was making, and assured her self-appointed nurse each day that “to-morrow she was going to get up and go about her business, confessed on the fifth day that there “wa’n’t more strength to her than there was to a

wilted cabbage leaf," and she didn't know what was to become of her. It was then that Dr. Portland was permitted to come up and make "just a friendly call." He looked grave and professional when he came away.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE OF THEM GOES HOME.

IT is going to be a long, slow business," he explained to Mrs. Holmes, who had followed him out; "the woman is, as she says, 'all tucked out.' She has a slow, wearying fever, and is broken down in numberless ways; she needs care and patience and much petting."

"I will take care of her," urged Mrs. Holmes. "She is really very little care; she lies quiet a great deal of the time."

Both gentlemen shook their heads, the husband in a peremptory manner. "It is of no use, Chrissy," he said decidedly, in answer to her look, "I will be as reasonable as possible, but any more wholesale nursing I can not permit; it has been one of my drawbacks toward gaining health, the persistency with which I was tempted to worry about you. As for undertaking another case so soon after mine, it is not to be thought of. Mrs. Stetson needs a nurse."

“Oh, Stuart, the idea! The very mention of it would make her frantic; she would suppose herself much worse than she is, and the thought of the expense would trouble her; besides, where is a nurse to be had?”

“She needs me,” said a firm voice in the background, and Madeline Hurst pushed wider the door of the dining-room and entered.

“I heard your last words,” she said smiling in answer to their surprise; “I came to know if there was not something I could do to help. Mrs. Stetson was very kind, when I was sick; there is nothing to prevent my spending both days and nights with her if she will let me; and I think I know by this time just what sick people want.” Mrs. Holmes expected that the doctor would object to this, on the score of Madeline’s health; but somewhat to her surprise he pronounced it an excellent plan. “For the days,” he explained, “as to nights we will try to have our patient sleep quietly so that all she will need will be Happy, on a couch near at hand in case of any thing unexpected. I do not imagine that she is going to be very ill; there will be hours during the day when she may be safely left to the sleep which she needs.” So it came to pass that the household, thus re-organized, settled with remarkable celerity into its new grooves and ran smoothly. Outside the sick-room, absolute comfort reigned.

The boarders were one and all delighted with the change, and one of the more unfeeling declared that while he wished the landlady no harm, he thought it would be decidedly for her benefit to keep her bed for a year or two. Happy confided to Mrs. Holmes that 'Mis' Carpenter moved awful swift and was kind of glum, but for all that she wa'n't onreasonable, and they got along first rate; and that the way the boarders treated that old Joe was real nice to see; there wa'n't one of 'em but seemed to be interested in his keepin' right.' Be it remarked in passing, that Happy excepted one who had gone from the house, and the city. Whatever Dr. Portland's "word" had been which he promised to speak, it had been strangely effective in relieving them not only from Mr. Arson's attentions but his presence. For a day or two after his departure, Mrs. Holmes wondered curiously, somewhat anxiously, whether Happy's heart had gone away with him. She questioned, one day, with a view to discovering. "Why, yes," said Happy, with a kind of slow gravity, "I miss the things he used to say to me; they sounded nice, and I ain't had no great of friends, ever; but Dr. Portland says he didn't mean a word he said, and I don't s'pose he did. I don't s'pose it would have made any difference if he had; I ain't wanted him to say nice things to me since the night he told me a lie."

“Did he do that?” Mrs. Holmes asked anxiously, wondering much, what sort of influence the man had tried to get over this ignorant girl, and whether there was danger that he would attempt to renew it.

Yes, ma'am, he did; He told me there wa'n't no such person as Jesus Christ; said he knew there wa'n't, and you folks was all tryin' to deceive me because I was a poor girl that had never had no chance. Of course I knew that was a lie, because I'm acquainted with Jesus Christ myself, and there can't nobody cheat me about that!”

“The Lord takes care of his own in unexpected ways,” said Mrs. Holmes to her husband, as she detailed this conversation, the tears being in her eyes the while. It seemed wonderful that Happy Smithers should really be “acquainted” with Jesus Christ!

* * * * *

All these experiences which we have been living over, took time, and the winter, which in that choice country was winter only in name, slipped away; the more noiselessly and unconsciously for the fact that it seemed always to be October, or May; the “long, slow winter” to which Mrs. Chrissy Holmes had looked forward with so many unspoken forebodings, the time when she was to fold her hands and wait! Had they ever been fuller? In reality she had not even had time to

write those long, full letters which she had promised to Harmon and his wife, and to Nellie, and Chess Gardner. Yet, as I say, she did not realize the swift passage of time, and was always looking forward to "next week," when she meant to write, and to read, and to do many waiting things.

"As soon as Mrs. Stetson is well again," was the time set now for doing thus and so. And the weeks passed, and Mrs. Stetson kept her room and for the most part her bed; and Mrs. Carpenter kept the astonished kitchen in immaculate order, and the boarders in a state of satisfaction never before attained. And Madeline Hurst continued to "go out to nurse," as her sister-in-law put it, with curling lip; adding that she supposed she was doing it for the sake of Liph, who seemed to be the only string she had left to her bow.

Poor Liph! Nobody had as yet succeeded in prevailing upon him to help himself. He was steadily going downward, not with long strides, but by the process of daily, sure descent.

One other outward change had taken place which caused a great deal of talk in the neighborhood where the Hursts lived; Dr. Portland, whose former boarding-place had been broken up, removed himself to the Stetson house early in the landlady's illness. "It is quite as central as my old place," he explained to Mr. Holmes, "and I shall be within call at night in event of ever being

wanted. Besides, it will make my bill more comfortable for the old lady, if she has one against me to offset it."

These were the reasons he gave; but Mrs. Hurst sneered and said: "Now he can flirt to his heart's content; he must have had some trouble since Mad went down there to work; it left them no excuse for running here. That woman's husband must be blind and stupid; perhaps he lost his mind during his illness; I am sure it looks like it."

Never were two people more serenely unconscious of the gossip which was now afloat throughout that street concerning them; and being no wiser than pure-minded young people often are, they innocently gave additional fuel to the mean and wicked flame by their frank and friendly interchange of courtesies and kindnesses. "She even mends his driving-gloves for him, right in plain sight, too!" detailed Mrs. Hurst with her voice full of exclamation points, which were echoed and translated by certain eager friends of hers. "I passed there this morning, and she stood on the piazza taking the last stitches, and he waiting for her with his horses at the gate, and they chatting together like a couple of doves. It does beat all!"

There came a day when the quiet, smooth-running machinery of the readjusted house was

rudely broken in upon. Mrs. Stetson, who had been the quietest and most grateful of patients, was unusually restless, and inquired several times during the day for the doctor, who had gone on a long country ride, leaving word that he could not be back until evening.

“She is anxious to see you,” Mrs. Holmes explained, meeting him in the hall just at twilight, “but I do not know for what reason; she does not seem to be suffering.” But directly the experienced eyes of the physician rested upon her, he knew, and seemed almost bewildered by the knowledge. He questioned Madeline half-sternly as to what had happened during the day. “Nothing has happened,” said Mrs. Stetson, “not a thing but what was nice and good. She has been just as kind and attentive as she could be, and so have they all; but it has come all the same; I knew it would; I’ve felt sure of it for quite a spell. I’m going, ain’t I? I thought so; I see it in your face. Well, now, as I tell you, I’ve thought so this long time; and you needn’t think I’m sorry; because I ain’t, not a mite. I’ve laid here and thought it all out; and it is the best thing that could happen all around. Mis’ Carpenter, she gets along first-rate and keeps the boarders comfortable; they’ve told me so one time and another, all along; and Liph”—there came a sudden pause, and the worn face worked strangely

for a moment, then she said quietly in an altered tone, "It will be all right about Liph, too."

It took them all night and much of the next day to get their bearings, and understand how this new, strange thing could be.

They cross-questioned the doctor.

"It is sudden," he explained; "I have been fearing something of the kind, when I saw how impossible it seemed for her to rally, but I thought there would be weeks yet, possibly months, and in the meantime there might be a change for the better. It is a remarkable change for a day to make; but it is made. She is quite right; the time is very short. That poor fellow ought to be told, and ought not to leave her much now, because she is liable to sink away at any moment." Poor Liph! One and another had almost unconsciously used that adjective of late in speaking his name; it never applied more fully apparently than now. They had not looked to see him show much feeling, but they were utterly mistaken. It appeared that that sullen exterior covered a heart which could ache terribly. Of all the household, none were so much amazed, so incredulous as he. It seemed as though it had never once crossed his mind that his mother might die. He sat like a statue of misery beside her bed, and would not be comforted. There was very little time in which to get used to the news.

Before evening of the second day it was apparent to every one who saw her, that Mrs. Stetson was going from them swiftly. Among them all she was really the only one who was quite composed. "It is all just right," she said, gratefully; "I've been a good deal of a talker, but there's some things I didn't seem to know how to talk about, so I ain't said a word; but I've got a good deal to say. Things is very different with me from what they was. Do you remember, Mis' Holmes, that time you come to the kitchen and washed up, and made lemon pies, and I don't know what you didn't do; and you sent me up stairs to get down on my knees, and pray about something you told me, while you dished up the dinner? Well, I done it, jest as you said, and it made the most amazing difference with everything, and has ever since. First I thought I'd live, and be so different that the very hens in the yard wouldn't know me; but I found that wasn't so easy to do; you said I scolded Liph too much, and it is true, I did; poor Liph! he's had a hard life of it," and the wrinkled, yellow old hand reached out and rested on his shock of hair, the while the fellow fairly groaned in agony. "I don't know why I should have been hard on him, either; I'd'a' been willing to die for him any minute since he was born; but Liph, poor fellow, your mother did not know how to live for you; and she almost killed

you with her tongue. I see it now, just as plain as day; and I saw it after this time I'm telling you of, and I tried hard to make it different, but I'm getting to be an old woman, old before my time, they say—never mind, I'm old; and it was hard work not to burst out at him when I was tired and cross; and I kept a doing it when I didn't want to." At this point Liph dropped upon his knees beside the bed. "Oh, mother!" he cried, "Oh mother, don't! You have never said any thing to me that I didn't deserve a hundred times over. Oh, mother, forgive me and live, for my sake; mother, I love you."

A radiant smile overspread the sallow face on the bed. "Hear that now!" she said, and her hand rested again on his head, and brushed back the shock of hair tenderly. "He loves me, and I always knew he did. I'm going to live, my boy; I'm going to live in heaven. It is a wonderful thing; I never expected it; not for the last thirty years, but I be. It is all settled, and I'm tickled to go, because I can see as plain as day that it will be better for you, my boy. You will never disappoint me again; I'm sure of it. It was kind of borne in upon me all night, that He would get hold of you by my going away, somehow, and keep you. He can do it; Joe Carpenter here, knows He can, don't you, Joe?" And into the solemn stillness of the second in which she waited

for an answer, came Joe's grave voice, saying firmly, almost exultingly :

“Aye, that He can ; didn't He get hold of me ?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Stetson, repeating the exultant note ; “He did, and He got hold of Happy, and of me. What is the use of doubting, after that ? Oh, Liph, I know you will. You will be mother's boy again, as you used to be ; and mother will be proud of you. She will watch you up in heaven, and say to some angel, every now and then : ‘Do you see that blessed man down there ? That's my Liph.’ And she will watch for you to come to heaven, and when you come, she will put her hand on your arm, and say : ‘This is my Liph.’ I know you'll do it. You will never disappoint your mother.”

Liph's groans had ceased ; he knelt beside the bed, his head buried in the clothes, but as his mother's voice stopped, he raised it and looked steadily at her with eyes which were tearless. “Mother,” he said, “I never will, never, so help me God. From this minute I swear to you, that I will never drink another drop of rum, and I will do the best I can to live the life you want me to ; I call upon God to hear my words, and take hold of me.”

No words will describe the power of the scene, nor the look of unearthly brightness on that mother's face.

“My little boy,” she said, low and in infinite tenderness. “Mother’s little boy; hers forever. He will never disappoint me again; and he calls upon God to help him; the God who helped me; and He will do it.” Then, still in the same exultant tone, she said: “Joe, I want you to pray. I’ve had good prayers; Mr. Holmes, he’s been in every morning, and every evening, and prayed such prayers as helped me to see God right here in my room; but I’d just like to hear you pray once.”

Instantly Joe Carpenter, the reclaimed drunkard, dropped upon his knees; the entire circle about the bedside with one exception, followed his example; and there went up to God such a prayer for Liph and for Liph’s dying mother as certainly that boy at least would find it hard to forget. During the few never-to-be-forgotten moments, one thing occurred which even then brought a flush of joy to Mrs. Holmes’ face, and she pressed her husband’s hand to call his attention. The only one who had not bowed before God was Mrs. Carpenter, standing pale and cold in the background; but as Joe’s voice filled the room, and his simple, solemn words filled their hearts, she came swiftly, silently, and dropped beside her husband, laying her hand trembling and cold upon his. It was instantly grasped; and Mrs. Holmes seeing it, let the smiles come with her tears. Dr. Port-

land was only half heeding the prayer ; his eyes were upon the rapt face on the bed. She lay still, with closed eyes, with her hand resting upon Liph's head, and a look upon her face which was not of this world. She lay motionless even after all had risen save Liph ; but the repose of her face was so natural, so unlike death, that it was not until the doctor said in low tones, "It is over," that any of them knew she had gone away.

But a few days after this experience, Mrs. Holmes received a call that gave her almost more surprise than any thing which had occurred during her absence from home.

The Reverend Dr. Longman, pastor of the church which she had attended, asked to see her on special business. He had called before, of course, but it had been at a time when her husband was not gaining as she had hoped, and her heart had been so heavy and preoccupied that she had felt but little interest in the call, and hardly considered herself acquainted with the pastor. She was aware that during Mrs. Stetson's illness there had been special meetings held in the church and that there was an unusual interest ; but she had known very little about them beyond the fact that Joe Carpenter had been regular in attendance, and that Happy had gone when she could. Mr. Holmes did not yet venture out in the evening, and she herself had been so absorbed as to leave

neither time nor strength for evening service. The disorganized household had not yet settled as to what was to be done in the future, when Dr. Longman made his call. He was gray-haired, courteous, gentle-voiced and bewildered. He had always seemed to the energetic young woman like a good man who was half-dazed with his surroundings, and never quite certain as to what would be wise to do next. Therefore she was the more astonished when he plunged, gently indeed, but after all plunged into the practical.

"Mrs. Holmes, excuse me, but I have an idea that you are especially interested in young people. Am I right?"

"Why, I think so," Mrs. Chrissy said, hesitating and smiling; she was still so young herself as to have given but little thought to the people who as a class claimed her special interest; it had simply been natural to think about the girls and boys, of course.

"That is what I thought," the doctor said, complacently; "it has been borne in upon me that you might be just the person with whom to advise, now that I have come to a sort of climax as it were, or station, perhaps, from which it seems desirable to take a new departure. You are aware, perhaps, of the special interest we have been having in our congregation during the past few weeks?"

Mrs. Holmes explained how little she knew about it, and reminded him of the peculiar circumstances which had held them from enjoying the meetings.

“Ah, yes, I know,” he said kindly. “It has been very sad, and yet very wonderful. The power of the religion of Jesus Christ, His ability and His willingness to reach and to save to the uttermost, has been borne in upon me wonderfully of late. I knew the poor woman to whom you have been so kind; knew her slightly. I confess that she seemed to me like one whom the gospel might never reach. It is simply wonderful to think of her as in heaven!”

“It must seem so to you,” said Mrs. Holmes, sympathetically. He looked to her like a mild and cultured saint who had not realized before that any but the high-toned and reasonably well educated, were included among those whom Christ came to save.

“Simply wonderful!” he repeated thoughtfully, not to her, but to space, with a far-away rapt look upon his face.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHE LOSES THEM—EVERY ONE.

WELL," he added, after a moment's silence, making an evident effort to get back to the practical, "we have had good meetings, and I may say unexpected results. There have been several conversions among the—well, the unusual classes; you have met the man Joseph Carpenter, I think?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Chrissy, controlling a wicked inclination to laugh, and putting it into a little cough, instead.

"Yes, so I have heard. You have been instrumental in helping him, as well as others, I believe; the Lord has given you a power, dear madam, that I could almost envy. Joseph Carpenter is a miracle of redeeming grace; and there are others almost as surprising. What I feel, what I have been thinking for a long time, indeed, is that something ought to be done for our young people; something more definite, I

mean, than we seem able to compass with the regular means of grace at command. I do not know that you are acquainted with a movement of which I have read with constantly deepening interest; and yet you may have heard of it. It occurred to me to ask you; I refer to the Christian Endeavor movement; it seems to have become a power in some portions of our country."

You who knew Chrissy Hollister hardly need to be told that Mrs. Holmes at once flashed into such eager, delighted enthusiasm as almost overwhelmed the quiet doctor of divinity before her. She became instantly such a "bureau of information" as he had not imagined possible to one small woman, and poured out her facts, and her convictions, and her hopes, in a tumultuous flood.

"I am gratified beyond measure," he said, at last, when there was a place for him to speak. "I had hoped, for some reason — it seemed a sort of inward conviction — that you might be able to give me some suggestion; but I did not know what a mine of wealth I was about to reach. May I hope that you will help us try to organize something of the kind here, very soon? I assure you I think there is need and opportunity. We have more young people among us than I had realized, until within a few weeks; and some are peculiar persons, needing all the help which

organized effort will give them. There is a young woman by the name of Hurst, you have probably met her? I am told that she was employed here during Mrs. Stetson's illness. She tells me that she has very lately taken a stand for Christ; she comes from a peculiar household, but I think she may perhaps be helped, and be made helpful. Then, there is the young woman Hepzibah Smithers; that is truly another remarkable instance of divine power, Mrs. Holmes; and then, poor Eliphalet Stetson—it may seem presumptuous, but I really begin to be hopeful for him; if we could rally around him, some way, and give him our support, who can tell what the result may be?"

That trying sense of the ridiculous, which had been poor Chrissy Hollister's discomfort many a time, now almost overpowered Mrs. Stuart Holmes, who very much wanted to be matronly and dignified. The idea of the Reverend Dr. Longman, with his studied courtliness of manner, and studied courtesy of speech, 'rallying' around Liph Stetson, was almost too much for his listener. What a blessing it was when the door opened suddenly and her husband came in search of her! "Oh, Stuart," she said, rising quickly, "I was just wishing you were at home. Dr. Longman, has such good news, and such a beautiful idea, which he has asked our help in carrying

out ; I have told him we shall be only too glad to help."

"And so," wrote the lady to her long-suffering brother and sister, a few evenings thereafter, "we actually have a full-fledged Christian Endeavor society, with thirteen active members and ever so many associate. And what seems very strange to me, is, that not one of the persons whom I have pleased myself by calling in fancy, my associate members is left on that list! They have every one entered the ranks of the 'active.' And we put Liph Stetson on the 'Lookout Committee!' think of it! I told him I placed his name there, mentally, the night he made an effort to look out for my Madeline's peace; the statement called from him the nearest approach to a smile there has been on the poor fellow's face since his mother died. Joe Carpenter is also on the Lookout Committee. 'I'll do it, Mis' Holmes,' he exclaimed, when I had explained some of his duties, and his homely old face was radiant, 'I'm a doing it now; I'm looking out all the while for Mis' Carpenter and the doctor; I just hanker after 'em both; and I really believe I'll get them!' So far as his wife is concerned I begin to think he will. She makes few concessions outwardly, but is very much changed, nevertheless; and she did actually tell me this very night, with a grim face it is true, but in a

tone which meant business, that I was right when I said Joe was a better man than she was woman. 'He ought to have had his chance with a better wife,' she said. 'It wouldn't be safe to make any such remark to him,' I told her, whereupon there flitted just the ghost of a smile over her face, the first I have ever seen there which had no mockery in it. I really feel more hopeful about her than I ever expected to; and Stuart is confident. 'The Lord will give her to Joe as a trophy of grace,' he says, 'and give them both to the world as a token of what He can do, even with the most unpromising of His creatures.' One may well say that of Liph Stetson, too. We shall keep watch of 'poor Liph,' as you say I always call him, with peculiar interest. He is very young yet; there is a chance for him to do almost any thing good with his life; and he is not going to disappoint his mother, you know! She had almost unbounded ambitions for him. I reminded him of that, last night, when he was pumping a pail of water for me, and we were having a word of confidence together. 'I know it,' he said, with a look in his face which we used to call 'dogged,' but which now one is inclined to name resolution, 'I know it, and I'm bound to do my best; I told her so.' But as regards the doctor, I do not feel so hopeful; he is very reticent, much more so, indeed, than he used to be; but he makes no more mock-

ing speeches. The truth is, that for people who stood together by Madeline's sick bed, and saw her terror of death, and then, who knelt together about Mrs. Stetson's bed and saw her die, mockery is manifestly out of place. Dr. Portland never does any thing which looks out of place, but whether his worldliness is too deep-rooted ever to yield, is a question which gives me anxious hours. Stuart, of course, is hopeful; he always is, you remember. He, by the way, has not forgotten how to organize and manage Christian Endeavor societies; the way he took hold of this one, and brought order and harmony out of apparently incongruous elements would have delighted your hearts. 'He has a rare gift, madam,' says the courtly Dr. Longman, and I fully agree with him."

After all this, it came to pass one morning that summer was upon them! There had been no spring-time, rather the winter had been one long-continued, balmy spring, with no hint about it that other things were to be expected, until this breathless morning announced the summer as at the door.

"We must go home!" said Mrs. Chrissy, coming in from the piazza, in the early morning, because the sunshine was too powerful for her. "The time has really come to say it! Last summer — no, last spring, when was it that we

came?—I was skeptical as to the months ever passing. How they have rushed away! And oh, Stuart, how many interests there are to leave!”

Her husband laughed. “For a woman who intended to fold her hands and wait, they have been rather full hands, I think,” he said cheerily. “But see here, dear, your exclamation about going home, comes in appropriately; here are business letters which strongly hint the same; and really I do not know that we have any excuse for lingering much longer. I can not plead lack of strength; I am as strong as I ever was; and if you read these letters you will see that the more we hasten, the better it will be for some things.”

So the decision came suddenly, with almost an unexpected air to it; as to people who were so busy with their work by the way, that they had forgotten about the home-going.

“I wonder if it will be a little so, perhaps, about going to heaven?” said Mrs. Chrissy, stopping short in the midst of her preparations to indulge the thought. “We shall be busy in our work, His work, you know, glad in it, absorbed in it; as if, apparently it were all our life; and then, suddenly hearing His call, we shall make haste to put it into the hands of others, and go joyfully home.”

“What is all this I hear?” Dr. Portland said, coming in upon them in the evening, after a two

days' absence. "It seems to me it is a remarkable proceeding for a patient of mine! Rather taking matters out of my hands!"

"You have put the patient out of your hands," said Mr. Holmes; "given him up, you know. After a doctor has done that, there is no further need for deferring to him, remember. It is somewhat sudden," he explained in response to the doctor's questionings, "at least it seems so to us; we had, as my wife was just saying, absorbed ourselves in the work here to such an extent that we had put the day of fitting into the background; but business matters with which I now feel entirely able to grapple, need me, so we are making ready in earnest."

"Everything is nicely arranged," Mrs. Holmes said, making haste to talk about the comparatively commonplace; for the doctor's grave, moved face, reminded her of how large a place they filled in his life, and how sure he was to miss them, more than, in the nature of things, they could him. "We've accomplished a great deal of business in these two days. Mrs. Carpenter is going to take charge here, and all the boarders have promised to stay; you will, won't you? It is all as comfortable as possible; Happy is glad to stay and be taught the 'rightest way of doing everything,' she says. Mr. Holmes has become responsible for the house-rent, and Liph is glad to give the use

of the furniture for his board. As for Joe, or 'Mr. Carpenter,' as Mr. Holmes says I ought to call him, I think he will grow into as respectable a head of the house as any boarders need desire. Isn't it pleasant to be able to leave everybody so comfortably settled?"

"Very," said the doctor, with dignified brevity. "Are you sure it is quite comfortable for everybody? What about your other friend, in whom I supposed you were somewhat interested?"

"Madeline?" Mrs. Holmes' face shadowed a little as she spoke the name. "I confess that I am not quite happy over her; she is going to remain here for the present; Mrs. Carpenter says she shall be the nominal head; but that will not do, of course; she is too young for such a position; and too" — She did not finish the sentence, but began again: "Still it was the best we could plan, just now. She will be exceedingly useful here, so far as that is concerned; a womanly girl, who knows how to make rooms homelike, will be a great blessing in such a house; and the work is not unpleasant. But to tell you the truth, I think Madeline is fitted for something different; we hope to have her with us, later, when we can plan for it, though we have said nothing to her, of course; our plans are too indefinite. You do not think a Northern climate would be too severe for her, do you, doctor?"

“Not in the summer,” he said significantly. “What, in the meantime, is to become of me? It looks very much as though every one’s comfort was being thought of but my own. Does it occur to you two how some people here will miss you?”

“The feeling is so mutual, doctor,” said Mr. Holmes, “that at present I find it will not do to talk about it. We do not by any means forget what we owe to you.”

The doctor turned abruptly from them. “I am coming North to visit you,” he said; “you will see me before the summer is over. By the way, where is Miss Hurst to-night?”

“She has gone to her brother’s,” Mrs. Holmes explained. “She thought it well to explain to them her plans for the immediate future; we are going down later to walk back with her. I am somewhat afraid that she will have an unpleasant time.”

That was putting it mildly, as Mrs. Holmes would have realized, if she could have been at that moment in Mrs. Hurst’s dining-room. Madeline sat there waiting for her brother, and undergoing a running fire of questions from her sister-in-law. That good woman, far from fond of Madeline as she was, had yet missed her more than she had supposed possible. It had been discovered that the girl who was reported to have

done 'almost nothing from morning until night,' had yet accomplished many things which had been for the comfort of the family. Not the least among her good offices, heretofore unappreciated, had been the willingness with which she stayed evening after evening with the children, leaving Mrs. Hurst free to spend her time with her chosen friends. Nancy's unwillingness to do this, had emphasized Madeline's usefulness. All things considered, Mrs. Hurst was quite willing to have her sister-in-law return to the only home she had; and heard with satisfaction of the contemplated departure of the Northern party.

"Mad won't be such a fool as to stay on there after they are gone," she explained to her husband. "She may be willing to be a servant to the Holmes woman; she is so smitten with her that she can't keep away from her, but the Carpenter woman is another thing."

This conclusion helped to make explanations very hard for Madeline. "Going back there!" demanded the annoyed lady in her loudest key; "what for, for pity's sake? You ain't hired out as a common servant, I should hope; though that is what you have had the name of being this long time. Dr. Longman asked me only the other day how long you were to be employed there! I thought I should sink through the floor! What do you mean? Going back for what?"

“For a great many things that there are to do,” Madeline said, with a weary sigh; she felt just then with unusual force the truth that everything would be very different when Mr. and Mrs. Holmes were gone; she hardly knew what there would be to do. Up to this time, curiously enough, Mrs. Holmes had been the real head of the house, at least, so far as her duties were concerned.

“Things!” repeated Mrs. Hurst in indignation; “if you are so dreadfully anxious to do things, I am sure there’s enough to do in this house, without going among strangers, or worse than strangers, to find them. Mad Hurst, do you mean to sit there and tell me that you have decided to disgrace your brother’s family out and out, by going out to service to that Carpenter woman?”

Nancy’s frowzled head was now thrust in at the door. “Dr. Portland is in the parlor,” she announced; “he says he would like to see ‘Miss Madeline,’” and Nancy showed all her not very carefully kept teeth, as though she had heard something which amused her.

“Oh, indeed! Miss Madeline! Hasn’t he got done making a cat’s-paw of you yet? If you knew all the talk there is about him and your dear Mrs. Holmes, you wouldn’t be so proud of the notice of either of them. At least you can answer a civil question before you run to him,

can't you? What are you planning to do over there?"

"I will explain later," said Madeline, and went to the parlor. Dr. Portland came forward to meet her. "Miss Madeline," he said, "I have been home and heard that which has taken my breath away. What are you and I going to do without our friends?"

"I do not know," she said, her lip quivering. "Oh, do not ask me," she added, struggling to retain self-control. "I do not know what I am to do. It almost seems as though I could not have them go."

"I will tell you," he said, speaking with infinite gravity, "what we must both do; we must take care of each other. I need your help now. Do you remember you asked me once for mine? You said you felt like a soldier who had deserted, and you wanted to find out how to re-enlist. You did not know that you precisely described my experience. I called myself a soldier, once, in this same army; and because I discovered that some in the rank and file were traitors, and others weaklings, doing positive harm by their half-heartedness, I was such a consummate idiot as to desert the Captain altogether. I made it my excuse that certain of his soldiers had injured me; as if that were a reason for my turning traitor! I have lived to see the folly of it. Certain people whom

I have watched, this winter, have taught me that a wholesale sneer at the army because some of the enlisted were failures, was neither honor nor common-sense. In plain English, Madeline, I want to come back and serve the Lord, and I want you to help me."

Her face was radiant with joy and surprise. "I am so glad," she said eagerly, "and so glad you think I can help you. Be sure that I will, in every possible way. But you do not need my help; you are so clear-minded, so resolute, so strong."

"There was never a greater mistake," he said in utmost gravity, "and you do not understand what you are promising; I feel that I shall need your help every hour of every day, on through the years. Are you willing to undertake it, Madeline? Willing to come to me, I mean, and be to me all that that kind of helping implies?"

"I do not understand," she said hurriedly; "I will do any thing I can to help you, Dr. Portland, always."

"Yes, but can you do this which I need, which I ask?"

* * * * *

It was perhaps a half-hour afterward, that the inevitable Nancy unceremoniously opened the parlor door and said, "They want Dr. Portland over at Simmonses right straight off."

"I will return if I can," said the doctor, rising, "but in the meantime, if Mr. and Mrs. Holmes reach here before I do, do not wait for me, I will see you at the house. You want to go back there to-night, do you not?"

"Oh, yes," said Madeline; "I told Mrs. Holmes that I would. But I also promised Mrs. Hurst that I would tell her this evening what arrangements I had made for the summer."

"Keep your promise by all means," he said with a curious smile; "I would not have Mrs. Hurst kept in suspense a moment longer than is necessary."

"Well!" said that lady as Madeline at last appeared in the dining-room, which was also the family sitting-room, "has he really gone? Half the town might die while he was carrying on his flirtations; such a doctor as that! What in the world does he want of you? Is he arranging an elopement with that charming Holmes woman, and asking you to help? I believe you are that bewitched with the tribe that you would take hold of it. What is he after?"

"He was after me," said Madeline with a curious light in her eyes, and a lovely flush on her face.

"Well, I heard that much, of course. I am asking you what he wants."

"He wants me to help him."

Mrs. Hurst laid down the small dress she was mending, and gave undivided attention to her sister-in-law. "Mad Hurst," she said, "is that doctor such a fool as to want a young thing like you to go out taking care of his patients?"

"Oh, no!" said Madeline, with a hysterical little laugh; "he wants me to take care of him. He has asked me to be his wife."

The scissors dropped on the floor with a resonant clang; the spool rolled unheeded under the stove and Mrs. Hurst sat and stared.

"Dr. Portland!" she ejaculated at last, "wants you! Well, I am beat!"

THE END.





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